My teaching innovation are two hands-on research projects conducted by students in my Introduction to Cultural Anthropology class this spring. In the first project, "Culture Partners" teams of two students conducted an interview with someone who had been born and raised (or at least raised in part) outside the United States, and wrote an ethnographic portrait of the person. Each two-student team was responsible for developing a set of questions, conducting the interview, and writing up the paper. Each individual student wrote a pre-interview reflection and a post-interview reflection. Students also had the option of posting their interview questions online on MyCourses (for extra credit) to encourage cross-fertilization of ideas and create a more collaborative approach. Through this project, students obtain an inside look at a culture other than their own, and equally if not more importantly, they gain a more critical awareness of their own culture by looking at it through the eyes of someone who comes from another country.

In the second project, "The Ethnography of UMD" students are free to work alone or as part of a team, and they use their newly-sharpened research skills to investigate a place, group of people or an issue or problem on the UMD campus. This project is carried out in the second half of the semester, immediately following submission of the first project. This encourages students to think about the ways that they can put the knowledge they acquire in the classroom to use addressing real-world situations and problems. This project involves two stages of peer review. Each student (or team) writes a project proposal which is peer-reviewed in class. Students also bring a rough draft of the report to class where it is peer-reviewed, and then submit a final version.

These projects are designed to support several of the key course learning objectives that are in line with our departmental learning objectives for introductory classes. These are:
  ➢ Students will learn basic methods of ethnographic fieldwork
  ➢ Students will gain an understanding of cultural relativism
  ➢ Students will apply anthropological insights to their own experiences

Introduction to Cultural Anthropology is a large class (sections are currently capped at 53 students). While there are some students who are departmental majors, or in allied disciplines such as PSC and PSY, the majority of the students enrolled in the class are students who are majoring in disciplines other than social sciences who take class to fulfill general education requirements for "diversity" or "global awareness" or simply as a free elective. The student population is fairly heterogeneous, ranging from dual-enrollment high school students to final-semester seniors. One of my key goals is to find ways of demonstrating that anthropological thinking –an awareness of and respect for cultural difference; and subjecting at all cultures, including one's own, to critical and comparative scrutiny– can be useful for a variety of career paths, ranging from business to engineering. To be effective and engaged citizens in an increasingly interconnected world, our students need to be willing to step outside the comfort zone of their culture – and to recognize that one's own culture is just as strange and "exotic" to others, as theirs are to us.

I also believe that students can best learn this through a combination of focused reading and first hand experience. One of the hallmarks of cultural anthropology is the belief that the best way to learn about other cultures is to immerse oneself and to try and see the world from someone else's perspective. We also stress the importance of using our knowledge in a socially responsible way, applying social science approaches to the world around us, and encouraging students to become engaged scholars or scholar/advocates.

In addition to the learning objectives outlined in the syllabus, the two projects fulfill some meta-objectives that have to do with learning how to learn, and learning how to develop (although on a small scale) a research project of their own.

In the Culture Partners project, students are responsible for finding someone to interview. they are also responsible for figuring out what they want the interview to focus on. Students are given general guidelines about how to do the interview. The project description instructs them that the interview should focus on both some aspects of their interviewee's home culture, on the person's experiences coming to the U.S. and their perspectives on American culture. In class I discuss interviewing techniques and we brainstorm some questions but I do not give students a list of topics or themes that they have to address. They have to figure out what to do if the person they are interviewing is not especially communicative or the questions they have prepared don't seem to be the right questions. They learn that research can be unpredictable and they have to think on their feet, to improvise, to throw away the script sometimes. In this way, even if the interview is difficult and does not elicit the information they wanted, they gain some invaluable lessons from the experience.

Students are also encouraged to be reflective learners. But to ensure that this reflection is not simply shared between the students and the instructor, I incorporated two in-class discussions – one at the beginning of the project and one after the project was completed. At the beginning of the project I allowed the students teams to meet and begin developing research questions and share some of their concerns about conducting the interview. These were selectively shared with the whole class. They then wrote individual reflections prior to the interview that were posted on the MyCourses discussion board. The day the papers were due, we spent most of the class period discussing what the students had gained from the project, any unexpected obstacles that had emerged and how students had dealt with them. Students then wrote a somewhat more structured reflection piece which was also posted on MyCourses. This combination of in-class discussion followed by individual reflective writing encourages peer-to-peer learning, and encourages students to take ownership of their own learning process. In the post-project reflection, I also ask students for feedback on the project and suggestions for improvement.

Another innovative aspect of this project is that I introduce it early in the semester and it is completed by the midpoint of the semester. This year the papers were handed in immediately following spring break. The next time I teach the class, in response to student comments, I will set the due date immediately before spring break. What this

does is allows me to read the papers and incorporate observations and insights from this project throughout the second half of the term. This is extremely important with student research projects. Too often the papers are handed in toward the end of the semester and while this undoubtedly allows for greater depth of research, it does not allow instructors to integrate the results of student research into the course. In short homework assignments during the second half of the term, I incorporated questions that asked students to compare insights or issues from the assigned reading to what they had learned from their "culture partner" (for example, one of the books we read in the second half of the term explores kinship, family, community and reciprocity, and students were encouraged to think about how the "cultural values" of their interviewee compared to the community we were reading about).

The Ethnography of UMD project focuses more on civic engagement and community-based learning, which are both emphasized in the university's strategic plan and our department's broad learning objectives. Students not only become active learners but they use their immediate surroundings as the site for scholarly inquiry. I encourage students to share the results of their research with the groups they have studied, or in more problem-oriented projects (i.e. studies of binge drinking, or the isolation of commuter students) with university officials responsible for those areas. In some cases, I have acted as an intermediary and, with students' permission, have presented the results of their research to staff in student affairs, admissions and other offices of the university.

This year, I also made a change in how I conducted peer reviews. In previous classes (upper level as well as introductory classes) I had asked students to write drafts, and exchange papers for peer review and conduct the peer reviews at home, but found that many did not complete the peer review or only did it in a cursory manner. Devoting class time to this exercise emphasized the importance of the peer review. It also encouraged dialogue between the students who reviewed each other's papers, and not simply checking off categories on a peer review rubric. I also revised the peer review rubric I had developed, so that each student had to write a short (approximately half a page) overall narrative assessment of the paper. This encourages critical reading and writing skills.

I also think that the combination of two research projects – both relatively small-scale -- provides reinforcement of the learning outcomes. Students have an opportunity gain some confidence in a more structured research assignment (everyone conducts an interview around a similar set of themes; everyone works as part of a two-person team), and then in the second project, Ethnography of UMD, they are given the opportunity to develop an inquiry of their own design. They are able to use any combination of ethnographic methods (surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation), and can work as an individual or a team. They therefore are forced to take more ownership of the project.

Sustainability: These projects are easily sustained in my classes as I have built them into the syllabus, and have developed templates for both projects (guidelines for conducting interviews; a simple consent form that has been approved by the IRB for class projects;

rubrics for peer review and reflections). I also have compiled a selective archive of successful projects and also project proposals for the Ethnography of UMD so that students in future classes can have some models.

Replicability: While in some ways these projects may seem uniquely relevant to anthropology and other social sciences, I think that several elements could be replicated in other disciplines.

- ➢ First, encouraging original research and inquiry-based learning in a large general education class. Very often original research assignments are left until advanced classes geared toward majors.
- ➢ Although supervising student research is labor-intensive for faculty, I use grading rubrics and I also focus on process rather than product (although I do reward good writing).
- ➢ In class peer reviews in the Ethnography of UMD project increased the efficiency of the peer review process..
- ➢ Two stages of in-class peer review (proposal and draft), emphasizing a process-oriented approach to research and critical reading and writing skills, could also be applied to almost any student research project in any discipline and at any level of study.
- ➢ The culture partners project relies upon a combination of individual and collaborative learning, as students worked in two person teams to prepare and conduct the interviews, assess the material and write the paper, but they wrote individual pre- and post-project reflections. I think this method of introducing, conducting and following up on a research project could be applied to other disciplines.
- ➢ Giving students general guidelines for the project but not establishing a strict research protocol encourages students to learn by trial and error, and again could be applied to other disciplines.
- ➢ Conducting student research projects early in the semester so that research results and insights from the project can be incorporated into the rest of the class is easily replicable in almost any discipline.
- ➢ The approach of using the campus community, and the campus itself, as an opportunity for scholarly inquiry has broad applicability. It encourages students to become engaged observers of campus life, and increases their awareness of different aspects of the campus community (examples include a team of white and African American students who studied the Asian Student Association; a team of non-gamers who interviewed gamers) or that may have taken for granted (a student project on relations between cafeteria employees and students). This kind of open-ended inquiry would make an ideal project for any program designed for freshmen across the disciplines. It could be incorporated, on a small scale, into orientation activities. Since the university is increasingly concerned about student retention, a project of this kind might be something to consider adapting for first year students, for transfer students, and for international students, either as a free-standing module or a component of other classes. It also lends itself to cross-disciplinary initiatives such as service learning. I am a

service-learning fellow and I have shared insights from this project with other
faculty in the service learning fellows program.
➢ I am preparing to write an article for an engaged scholarship journal about these
two projects.

Assessment: While I did not perform a formal assessment of either project, the student
post-interview reflections for the Culture Partners Project allow us to see how students
made sense of the process. In general, students were quite positive. A summary of some
student statements is attached. The template for the final report of the Ethnography of
UMD included a section on reflections (which students could incorporate into their
conclusion or have as a separate section). Since the papers were just handed in, I have not
had time to review many of them, but in the few that I have read, there have been some
very clear statements of what students learned through the project. One student, currently
a commuter, who studied residential life (as an outside observer), wrote that he had made
a major reassessment of his reasons for commuting, and had decided to become a
residential student next year as a result of this research project. I will continue to assess
the student reflections for evidence of self-reported student learning outcomes.

Sample student reflections from "Culture Partners Project"

After completing the assignment, I feel as though I have had my views changed a bit on the ways of culture and respect. I feel the African culture shows much more respect for their community as a whole in comparison to the United states. I would like to see this integrated into our culture more.

I learned a lot from this assignment. We are a society based on personal gain and basically consumed in our own lives. It is interesting to learn about another culture that have other ways of doing the same activities we do. This assignment made me think of all the components that make up a society and how much more we can all get involved;

Many stereotypes and ideas I had about Iranian and Middle Eastern culture were broken.

One of the most important things that I have learned with the Culture research paper is conducting the interview. It was important to keep the interviewer comfortable and interested.

I have made more connections and found out more information from sitting and talking with Vinny for 15 minutes, than I would have in years of reading about Brazil....I think I benefited greatly from this project and learned a lot about not just Brazilian culture but a lot about American culture as well.

I gained knowledge about a culture that I didn't know much about. The experience felt more like a conversation than an interview. The conversation flowed, which meant my partner did not have to rely much on our prepared questions. I enjoyed the assignment and the experience has helped me improve my interviewing skills which are an integral part of my studies as a political science major.

I would suggest to my teacher to continue this project in future classes because it was a great opportunity for me to learn about a culture very different from my own.

At first I was skeptical of how much I would learn from this cultural partners project. I figured there would be a lack of information on the subject's native culture. Quite to the contrary, Mr. XXXX provided ample information and then some.

This was a great project, and upon the conclusion it was refreshing to see that despite our different upbringings based on where we originated from- we are both striving for a common goal,

I learned a lot about the interviewee and myself from doing this cultural partners assignment.

I think this project was a good idea in getting a sense of a different culture. By conducting this interview, you can learn about a certain realness each culture has that only the people of the culture can know.

Overall, I thought the assignment was very interesting and I liked interviewing the person and learning more about their culture. Its very interesting to see how people see your culture from another perspective.

Over the course of this project I learned a lot of valuable lessons that will continue to be helpful to me throughout my life.