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# Anthropologists at Work:

Responses to Student Questions About Anthropology Careers

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## Responses to Student Questions About Anthropology Careers

Surveys show that students have many of their questions about the nature of professional work in anthropology answered by viewing the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology's video entitled **Anthropologists at Work: Careers Making a Difference**. Like all useful educational tools, however, this video program about the day-to-day work environments, arenas of inquiry, and practical applications of anthropology raises as many questions as it answers. This supplement is designed to provide answers to those questions students have raised most frequently after viewing the video.

### 1. How great is the demand for practicing anthropologists? Are there jobs?

While employment opportunities for practicing anthropologists are growing, it is not always easy locating these opportunities. As the video demonstrates, anthropological training and experience are applicable in many work settings but require anthropologists to stretch their imagination to envision possibilities. To discover job opportunities that appeal to you, you will have to explore opportunities that do not sound like traditional anthropology. Your imagination will be a critical factor in finding these openings. You will need to be able to look at a situation and recognize the possibilities for anthropological skills, and then be able to help others recognize that fit. It is not enough to present yourself as an anthropologist and expect someone to realize that you have skills and approaches they need to answer their questions. You will have to relate your experiences and education to situations that you might not think of as anthropology. You will have to learn how to adapt your language and the way in which you present yourself to others so that you can be seen and heard by potential employers.

As the boundaries between and among cultures and societies become less clear, as technology allows greater interaction among people, and as our own culture becomes more complex, the skills that anthropologists have will be of critical value to industry, government, communities and organizations of various kinds. Interesting and exciting job options for anthropologists will continue to grow so long as we provide useful products in return. The utility of our products is determined in large part by our ability to work as members of teams, our disciplined use of an array of anthropological tools, and be skillful at reporting our findings in a timely, accessible, and lucid way.

The use of interpersonal networks is a traditional anthropological tool. In planning a career as a practicing anthropologist, you will need to cultivate networks with other practicing anthropologists. Getting involved in the **NAPA Mentor Program**, a program available to students who are interested in the field, is one of the many ways to begin this process. In this program students (who are members of either NAPA, or the National Association of Student Anthropologists) are paired with practicing anthropologists. Their interaction may take many forms, including telephone conversations or face-to-face meetings to discuss internships, the job search or career issues generally. For further information, contact: Micki Iris, Buehler Center on Aging, 750 North Lake Shore Dr., Suite 601, Chicago, IL 60611-2611 ; 312/503-3087

## 2. If I am interested in working as a practicing anthropologist, what academic degrees do I need to get?

The majority of individuals employed as practicing anthropologists have either MA or PhD degrees, with a rapidly increasing number at the MA level. The degree level will vary depending on the expectations of employers, the region the work setting, and your own entrepreneurial skills. Although the number of positions for which a degree in anthropology is required or recognized as a qualifying credential is increasing all the time, there are relatively few jobs outside of college teaching or anthropological museum work that explicitly require a degree in anthropology. For the most part, you will compete with people holding various kinds of degrees. Many MA degree holders in practicing anthropology are able to successfully compete for jobs in local, state and federal agencies. A recent survey of graduates from the Master of Applied Anthropology program at the University of Maryland found that 24 of 32 program graduates (75%) had gotten jobs that were closely related to their area of training, while 6 of the other students had chosen to continue their education for a PhD. A PhD is an important asset for work as a consultant in international development settings or in medical institutions. In addition to your degree, your particular skills and experience play a critical part in the hiring process. This is why, as suggested in response to question #1, it was emphasized that you need to learn relevant job skills in the program that you choose. Very useful experience can often be gained through internships and job-experience placements (see question 5).

## 3. Are there universities that offer training programs in practicing anthropology?

While many academic departments offer training that will help prepare you for careers in practicing anthropology, there are numerous departments that offer programs that are specially designed to offer this kind of preparation at the MA and PhD levels. These programs are characterized by more elaborate training in general social science methodology, good working relationships with academic programs in relevant cognate fields (e.g., medicine, education, agriculture, business, public health, nursing), faculty members who do practicing anthropology as a part of their academic work, and a strong commitment to internships and practice. An innovative development in anthropology training in recent years has been the development of programs offering "career-oriented" training at the MA level, often with special emphasis in a particular area of work such as public archeology or medical anthropology. The considerable growth in the number of MA holders compared to the number PhD holders in anthropology in recent years reflects the success of MA training programs for practicing anthropology.

Information on special practicing anthropology training programs may be obtained from the [Guide to Training Programs in the Applications of Anthropology](#) published periodically by the Society for Applied Anthropology (see reference section). Some anthropology departments have specialized in one or more specific aspect of practice for some time. Some of these programs, all of which you can contact directly for specific information, include:

American University	Georgia State University	University of North Texas
University of Arizona	University of Kansas	Northern Arizona University
Boston University	University of Kentucky	Oregon State University
California State University, Chico	University of Maryland	University of South Florida
California State University, Long Beach	McGill University	Southern Methodist University
University of California, San Francisco	Memphis University	Syracuse University
Catholic University of America	University of Miami	University of Texas, Austin
University of Connecticut	Montclair State College	Wayne State University
Florida State University	State University of New York, Binghamton	
University of Florida	State University of New York, Buffalo	

#### **4. What courses should I take? What skills would it be good to acquire while I am in college?**

Preparing for a career as a practicing anthropologist requires solid and well-rounded academic training in anthropology. First, you should take available courses that will provide you with a strong grounding in anthropological theories, research methodologies, and analytical methods. Second, you should take courses that give you a broad exposure to anthropological work in particular topical areas (e.g., work, social organization, human migration, forensic sciences) and geographic areas of the world (e.g., Middle East, Mexico). Third, identify your subfield of interest within the discipline (e.g., biological anthropology, linguistics, medical anthropology) and enroll in core courses within your subfield. Next, you should take courses offered in other departments that complement your core courses and coincide with your broad career interests (e.g., if your interest is biological anthropology, you might take courses in anatomy and physiology). Finally, it is important to get training in writing, statistics, computer analysis, qualitative data analysis, and public speaking. While proceeding through your curriculum, you will develop your conceptual and analytical abilities. Take advantage of extra-curricular activities that will provide you with opportunities to increase your verbal and written communication skills. Excellent interpersonal skills also are essential for a practicing anthropologist.

#### **5. Would it be helpful to have internship experience? How do I get it?**

Yes, most definitely and for several reasons! Students commonly struggle with their professional identity. At what point does one become an anthropologist as opposed to an anthropology student? Internships are very important because they help you begin to form a professional identity and build a sense of confidence in your ability to "make it" in a particular field of study. Consequently, internships can have a profound effect on your career, helping you to get practical hands-on experience, build a network of contacts with people who may help you find work later, acquire new skills and knowledge, get involved in a project that develops into a long term commitment or even a job, refine your ideas and plans for thesis or dissertation research, and in some situations, observe practicing anthropologists "at work." What is an internship? They vary, but usually involve helping out on a new or existing project or program. Typically, you will have responsibility for some specific area of work as part of a larger team. There is usually some type of formal or informal training that goes on in an internship, because it is expected that a student will have little prior experience in the type of work they do as an intern. For example, a number of anthropology students over the years have held internships at the Hispanic Health Council, a community-based health organization in Hartford, CT. In this capacity, they have conducted ethnography on community-based AIDS program development, interviewed injection drug users on their drug use patterns, developed a program for men to prevent domestic violence, conducted interviews for a survey on community attitudes toward needle exchange, interviewed clinical patients about the importance of environmental health issues, and designed a database for the case management of prenatal clients. Because it is sometimes possible to write an internship position into grants, the Council has been able to offer a stipend to some of its interns. The availability of money for intern slots varies however. This example represents one type of internship; different kinds of internship are available at various organizations and institutions.

How do you get an internship? If your department does not have existing contacts with organizations and institutions that offer internships, you can start by deciding what type of work you would like to do. Are you interested in the health field, in education, in minority communities, in economic development, in environmental management? Next, ask around about the type of organizations or government bodies that do work in the area that interests you. Libraries can be of assistance, as can professional associations of various kinds that have member organizations. The third step is to identify the names of some people

working in the institution that interests you. Call the organization and see if they currently employ an anthropologist or other social scientist. If they do, that is a good person to start with on your way to landing an internship. If not, the director of personnel or even the executive director's office may be able to help you in applying for or proposing an internship. Write a letter (followed up a week later with a call) explaining your interest in an internship. Explain why you are interested in the potential host organization/institution. Try to be as specific as possible and explain:

- the types of things you'd like to do during your internship ( e.g., "learn about program development and management," "gain a better understanding of community-based research," "develop a better understanding of organizational culture and its impact on employee relations");
- the amount of time you have available and possible starting and ending dates for the internship;
- the need for an organizational liaison with your college or university to ensure course credit;
- any special needs you might have (e.g., time you will need to be away from the internship to study for mid-term or final exams);
- special skills or resources that you might have
- how your internship might benefit the host organization (e.g., assist in an evaluation of employee communication; help design an intercultural or diversity training workshop for staff; investigate community response to the discovery and excavation of an archeological site; assess community awareness of organizational services).

Be sure to work closely with your university advisor during all steps in this process. And, when you are accepted for an internship, try to adhere as closely as possible to the ground rules, procedures, and deadlines proposed by the host institution. In that way, the host institution may be willing to accept other interns in the future.

## **6. How do I go about getting a job after graduating? What is the best way to sell myself as a practicing anthropologist?**

Here is a suggested format for discovering your strengths, identifying job positions that might be suitable for your background and training, and preparing for a job interview.

First, identify your skills and abilities that are both related to your anthropological training and your general life experience. Some areas to consider include: interpersonal communication skills, writing ability, observational acuity, interviewing experience, experience with survey and statistical methods, familiarity with experimental design, foreign language and computer fluency, cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity, and training in the use of a holistic perspective. Many colleges and universities have career services that will help you write a resume. Preparing a resume will help you think through this process. The more concrete and experienced-based your resume, the more effective it is likely to be.

Second, since practicing anthropologists perform a wide array of job responsibilities (e.g., research, program design and management, program evaluation, teaching/training), talk to friends and contacts who hold these positions. Alternately, as indicated in response to question 5, you may want to get some internship/work experience in one or more positions with such responsibilities; sometimes a class project can give you some understanding of the world of work. Based on your conversations and/or your own first-hand experiences, figure out which types of job responsibilities you are best equipped to perform. You may also wish to talk with practicing anthropologists who have graduated from the program in which you are enrolled. The NAPA Mentor Program, mentioned in response to question 1, can help you if no one is available locally.

Third, review a variety of sources for information about job opportunities (e.g., through your own networks, career placement services, newspaper ads). Typically, you will not see job openings for an "anthropologist" position outside of a university setting, although positions for anthropologists are advertised in the American Anthropological Association's Anthropology Newsletter and on the job boards at the AAA's annual meeting and in your department. Instead, your skills and past work experience may qualify you for any number of jobs (e.g., intercultural training, program director, consultant, refugee services coordinator, policy scientist, curator, marriage and family therapist, development officer in a community organization, city planner, housing administrator, social worker, survey researcher, market analyst, archaeologist, project development officer).

Fourth, tailor your one page resume (or academic vita, in the case of academic/research positions) to a particular job opening. Many people find it useful to organize their experiences by the skills they acquired during particular projects, internships, or jobs (e.g., evaluated survey results, designed research project, supervised two assistants, developed communication plan, coordinated outreach efforts).

Fifth, if you are mailing your resume, always include a customized cover letter in which you highlight your special attributes as they apply to the position you seek and note the unique perspective (e.g., global, comparative, holistic)- you might bring to the job opening and to the organization.

Finally, since many employers are not sure what anthropologists are or what they have been trained to do, you should not necessarily assume that they are knowledgeable about anthropological training. Instead, during an interview, you may want to emphasize certain aspects of your background or provide them with specific details about your abilities to carry a project through from start to finish, the knowledge that you would bring to the position or organization, or examples from your training in which you were able to shed light on certain issues or understand and explain different viewpoints that people held or the actions in which people engaged

## **7. Who employs practicing anthropologists?**

In fact, you'd be surprised at the different kinds of places anthropologists are finding work. Some anthropologists have been hired in the private sector, for corporations or businesses involved in domestic operations as well as international trade. Others have found work as internal research analysts or consultants, assisting in product development, market research and advertising strategies. For example, one anthropologist works for a large, international drug company and is involved in research on nutrition and infant feeding practices. Another works for a U.S.-based consulting company that assists large corporations in employee relations and human resource management issues. Other anthropologists work in the field of technology development and technology transfer, helping to identify acceptance patterns of new technology both in the U.S. and abroad.

The public and non-profit sector-which includes government, non-profit agencies and organizations, as well as educational institutions-also employs many anthropologists. It is not uncommon to find anthropologists working in various departments in hospitals and at large university-affiliated medical centers, conducting research, teaching, and even performing administrative roles. One anthropologist works at a large medical center as the director of a research project studying women's health issues related to pregnancy, acceptance patterns of prenatal testing, and family planning practices. Another is a key member of a bioethics team that provides ethics consultations to physicians and families. Practicing anthropologists are employed in departments like surgery and pediatrics at local hospitals, serve as program directors and researchers in community-based organizations, work as staff members in state departments of health, and are independent consultants for a variety of non-profit institutions. The book Training Manual in Medical Anthropology (AAA) provides additional information on anthropology

careers in health. A companion volume is [Training Manual in Development Anthropology](#). See the suggested reading list at the end of this document.

Careers in non-profit agencies and organizations often provide anthropologists with opportunities to work as part of multidisciplinary teams, both within organizations and "in the field." Many anthropologists are employed by governmental agencies at all levels: federal, state and local. They may be program directors, research analysts, policy consultants, or service providers. Anthropologists interested in folklore have found employment at state and local historical societies and at community arts organizations; archaeologists often work for federal agencies like the US Forest Service, state highway departments or state or local museums. In addition, anthropologists have proven to be valuable members of research teams examining the problems of urban crime, HIV infection and AIDS, refugee resettlement, and domestic violence. For example, one anthropologist uses her skills and knowledge to direct a program which provides services to Native American peoples with disabilities. Another works with a city department of health, running the AIDS information and service office.

Anthropologists also are finding employment opportunities within the non-profit foundation and funding sector, working with the very agencies which often fund anthropological research. Wenner-Gren, the Ford Foundation, the National Science Foundation, and the many branches of the National Institutes of Health, are just a few of the organizations that regularly employ anthropologists.

Another area of work for many anthropologists is the museum field. Virtually all large natural history museums and some art museums have anthropologists on staff. They conduct research and help develop exhibits. One of the growth fields over the last two decades has been the increased number of anthropologists in other museum roles. For example, the Denver Museum of Natural History has two anthropologists in the Education Department who plan and direct educational activities for all ages, pre-schoolers to adults. If you are a person who enjoys research and equally enjoys translating the meaning and importance of research for the general public, then a museum position might be a good career path. Having anthropological training and being able to conduct research is the minimum requirement. The museum educator must be able to translate important concepts into understandable language and be able to convey the excitement and importance of research. An ability to work as a team member, meeting deadlines and working with the public are important skills to develop. Virtually all museum exhibitions and educational events are team activities. There are opportunities to work with other academics and other kinds of museum professionals such as educators, artists, model makers and exhibit fabricators. Emphasis is placed on being able to communicate ideas not only to the public but also to one's own administration, granting agencies and the news media. Assuming anthropologists would be working on anthropological exhibits, there are also opportunities to work with people from cultures represented in the exhibit. It can be a very stimulating environment.

As these examples suggest, there are many different kinds of institutions and organizations that employ anthropologists and the list grows longer every day.

### **8. How much do practicing anthropologists make? What about benefits?**

Salary levels range widely for practicing anthropologists. Several factors affect salary levels, including the employer, externally perceived degree of expertise of the anthropologist, prior experience, and the geographic location of the job. At the upper end of the salary range, a small number of practicing anthropologists make well in excess of \$100,000 annually, including significant royalties from publications. At the other end of the continuum, here are salary levels for practicing anthropologists who work in rural human services fields (add roughly \$1,000- 3,000 for similar urban employment):

Entry level (starting, little or no experience)

- \$16,500 and up with a BA
- \$18,500 and up with an MA
- \$25,000 and up with a PhD

With 5+ years of experience

- \$20,000 and up with a BA
- \$23,000 and up with an MA
- \$30,000 and up with a PhD

Practicing anthropologists with an MA and little/no experience can expect to start at about \$25,000 for a state or federal agency and about the same in a community organization. Those with a PhD but little/no experience can expect to start at about \$30,000. In larger corporate settings or in medical settings (e.g., hospital, primary health care clinic), those with an MA and little/no experience can expect about \$30,000 to start, while a new PhD can expect to start at about \$35,000. However, it must be emphasized that few of the larger corporations hire anthropologists at either the MA or PhD level with little prior experience. Community-based organization (as they are called in the U.S.) or Non-governmental Organizations (as they are called outside of the U.S.) are more inclined to hire anthropologists at the entry level.

Most of the mid-career practicing anthropologists make \$35,000 to \$75,000 annually. Those in the high cost metropolitan centers, like Washington, D.C., earn salaries in the range of \$40- 80,000 annually. The benefits packages associated compare to those of other professional jobs. For example, it is likely that the corporate, federal, or state employers will pay 50% or more of health insurance costs. However, because salaries and benefits packages, vary considerably, the best way to find out information that applies to your local area is by contacting local practicing anthropologists directly. NAPA can assist you in learning the names of practicing anthropologists who live in your area that you can contact for further information (also see response to question 10).

### **9. Are many anthropologists self-employed? How do you make a living as a private consultant?**

Recent survey data provide some information on the number of anthropologists working in the consulting field. In the 1990 NAPA Membership Survey, 25 percent of the respondents indicated that they work in the private sector for large consulting firms, as independent consultants, or in corporations. THE AAA also publishes data from its Survey of Anthropology PhDs. According to the 1990 AAA Survey, 8 percent of respondents listed themselves as employed in consulting firms or as self-employed. It is not surprising that there a higher proportion of consultants in the NAPA survey both because it is an organization oriented towards anthropological practice and its membership (and thus its survey) is not limited to PhD holders but includes bachelors and masters recipients as well.

Consulting employment is generally of two types. First, there is group that consists of full-time independent consultants (free-lancers), part-time consultants, and individuals involved in small

privately owned companies in which the owners are also the managing partners (and usually the founders as well). This group of consultants typically is self-employed (although the part-timers usually have some form of salaried employment in addition to their "moon-light" consulting work). There are a growing number of anthropological free-lancers and small consulting firms. They often find consulting work in their local area or region by bidding on publicly announced contracts, engaging in organizational publicity (e.g., circulating brochures on their work experience and capacity to community organizations, provider institutions, companies, and government bodies), and getting to know key people in organizations that do work in their area of expertise (e.g., evaluation, grant-writing, particular health or development topics, international relations). Becoming well known and developing a track-record are the keys to success in private consulting. Free lancers and members of small partnerships often spend considerable time finding new jobs, but once they develop a good reputation, they may become inundated with new opportunities.

Second there are anthropologists who are employees of large contract research companies or mid-size consulting companies. Often anthropologists in these organizations specialize in the health care field, international development, organizational management, or natural resources. Because they are salaried, anthropologists in larger firms are not dependent on their ability to attract outside funding. At the same time, they may have less control over which work assignments they will undertake.

Some actual examples of consulting jobs filled by anthropologists include:

- senior consultant in an organizational management consulting firm;
- vice president of a small consulting firm that specializes in natural resource management issues;
- an independent consultant based in Kenya who specializes in public health and family planning issues
- an anthropologist who works in the agricultural and natural resource division of a large, Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm that focuses on international development work;
- president of a consulting firm that specializes in cultural resources management and archeology;
- a part-time independent consultant who specializes in program development, organizational technical assistance, evaluation, and grant-writing for community-based health, arts, and social service organizations.

### **10. How are working conditions for practicing anthropologists? Are there special risks or difficulties?**

As a practicing anthropologist, you will face different working conditions depending on the location and nature of the organization you work for (e.g., its size, demographics, function, structure, goals, resources, values) and your role in that organization. If your job involves field work in other countries, that will, of course, be a major factor to consider. You will continually reevaluate the degree of fit between your job with its attributes and demands, and what you gain from that position (e.g., knowledge, ability to influence policy, opportunities to work on multidisciplinary teams, problem solving skills). The combination of your background, anthropological training, and prior work/internship experience will provide you with skills that will assist you in making the transition from either academics to practice, or from one practice job to another. Keen observation and interpersonal communication skills will be invaluable to you in trying to understand how work gets done in your new position, and how best you might fit in within that new work setting.

The difficulties that first-time practitioners face vary tremendously from person to person. Some encounter problems working with professionals from different disciplinary backgrounds. Some find that a quantitative perspective and its associated techniques appear to be valued more highly than qualitative approaches to understanding organizational and client issues. Some discover that they face and must resolve ethical challenges (e.g., related to the dissemination of information, conflict between job position and advocacy role) that they may not have encountered in an academic setting. Others who follow the consulting or contract path find that they must continually market their skills and expertise since many employers are not familiar with what anthropologists can offer their organization.

There are a number of professional associations that might provide useful networks or sources of information for anthropologists seeking career-related advice. In addition, they hold informal sessions at their annual meetings on career issues. These associations can be international, national, or regional in focus. The Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA), which can be reached at (405) 843-5113, and the American Anthropological Association (AAA), which can be reached at (703) 528-1902, hold annual meetings, publish journals, and offer their memberships various services. For example, the AAA has committees established to deal with selected membership issues (e.g., Committee on the Status of Women, Committee on Ethics). As noted in response to question 1, NAPA, one of the AAA sections, sponsors a Mentor Program for those seeking career advice. Other associations known as Local Practitioner Organizations (LPOs) are regionally based in various parts of the US. (e.g., Washington, DC., Southern California, Memphis, Chicago, Great Lakes Region, Denver, Northern Florida). Their members typically meet on a regular basis and publish newsletters.

Certainly some jobs hold special risks and dangers. Anthropologists who are studying the role of cocaine in urban settings, AIDS risk among injection drug users, or gang prevention among youth, for example, have encountered quite dangerous situations that demand they exercise all of their ethnographic skills in rapport building and conflict resolution. Books like Being an Anthropologist, Surviving Fieldwork, and Doing Fieldwork: Warnings and Advice provide additional examples of risks in anthropological work and the strategies anthropologists have developed to minimize those risks.

11. Tell me about some or the other careers or practicing anthropologists that are not shown in the video.

By looking through the NAPA Directory of Practicing Anthropologists you can begin to understand the breadth of careers pursued by anthropologists. Anthropologists are strongly represented in every aspect of the public sector. Anthropologists can currently be found in such widely diverse federal venues as the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the National Science Foundation, the Government Accounting Office, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the National Cancer Institute, the National Park Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These federal agencies are only one arena of the public sector in which anthropologists work; local, state and regional governments have needs for the same skills that make anthropologists valuable at the federal level. In these agencies, anthropologists are evaluators, managers, planners, and policymakers. Anthropologists can also be found in the private sector offering, for example, consultation to the government as well as other private sector organizations. This consultation may be in such areas as the development of new programs and approaches to technical and social problems, and in the impact of legislation or policies on populations of interest. The private sector has a myriad of interesting possibilities for anthropologists, ranging from focusing on the changing make-up of the workforce, to the creation of new markets for products, to developing machinery that is responsive to human needs. Anthropologists also are employed in

international organizations, such as the World Health Organization or the Pan American Health Organization, where they are involved in projects in various countries around the world. A growing number of anthropologists have been hired by non-profit agencies to develop and direct community projects, conduct evaluations of program effectiveness, assist in the development of educational curricula and educational tools, analyze data, and write grants (also see the responses to questions 7 and 9).

## 12. Can students join NAPA?

Yes! JOIN US! NAPA welcomes students to not only become members but to become active members. To become a member, you must first join the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and select NAPA as the section you wish to affiliate with. As a student, you are entitled to reduced membership fees (the 1994 AAA student membership is \$45 and NAPA student membership is \$15). Student membership is available only if you are enrolled in a formal college or university program leading to a degree. For a membership application, write to Membership Services, AAA, 4350 N. Fairfax Dr., Suite 640., Arlington, VA 22203; (703) 528-1902.

Other organizations you might wish to join are the National Association of Student Anthropologists (also through the AAA) and the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA, PO Box 24083, Oklahoma City, OK 73124; 405-843-5113).

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