

# COTLOW FIELD RESEARCH FUND

**Department of Anthropology  
The George Washington University  
Washington, DC 20052**

## **2006 PROJECT DESCRIPTION FORM**

Applicant: **Dana R. Thomson**

Title of Project: **Study of an HIV/AIDS Care Organization in Washington, DC**

The Lewis Cotlow Field Research Fund is a GW Anthropology Department fund, established in 1990 as a bequest by the explorer Lewis B. Cotlow to further field work and exploration. All undergraduate or graduate students at The George Washington University are eligible to apply, but preference is given to those in anthropology programs. Funds are to be used for travel, research assistance, and other expenses related to field research.

The deadline for application is 5 p.m. on the first Friday in March of the year for which support is requested. Applications must be submitted in hard copy; no electronic submissions will be accepted.

## DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED COTLOW FIELD RESEARCH PROJECT

### I. Personal Information

Name: **Dana R. Thomson**

Permanent / Current Address:

Home Phone:    Other Phone:    E-mail:

Degree Sought: **BA**            Field of Study: **International Affairs, Minor in Public Health**

Expected Date of Graduation: **May 2008**

Faculty Advisor(s) for This Project: **Professor Robert Shepherd, Professor Barbara Miller, Professor Kannan Nambiar, Emily Tumpson (MA candidate)**

Does your proposed project involve the use of a "field language"? **No.**

If so, state what it is, and note your degree of fluency in speaking or writing.

### II. Brief Abstract of the Project

Title of Project: **Comparative Study of Two HIV/AIDS Care Organizations in Washington, DC**

Amount Requested: **\$312**

In 100 words or less, clearly state the goals of the proposed research.

The proposed fieldwork will investigate the institutional culture of an HIV/AIDS organization in Washington, DC: Community of Hope. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS is high in Washington with 1 in 20 adult residents infected with the virus (Whitman-Walker 2003). Through participant observation and interviews, I will create a mini-ethnography of the organization, documenting institutional culture as it is shaped by the history, structure, and daily activities of the organization. In the spirit of applied anthropology, I will collaborate with leaders at Community of Hope to ensure that my fieldwork supports their mission and activities.

### **III. Significance of the Project to Anthropology.** What is the relationship of the proposed research to other anthropological research in this field and region? (250-500 word maximum)

The approach and goals of this fieldwork meet at the crossroads of critical medical anthropology and the study of institutions within cultural anthropology. My research will focus on the institutional “culture” of Community of Hope, a community-based health care organization that is increasingly focusing on HIV/AIDS in Washington, DC. As an institutional ethnographer, I will research the historical circumstances under which the organization formed including the types of people “targeted” by their work and why, their mission, staffing structure, daily operations, and the individual workers and volunteers that make up the organization.

#### The Cultures of Health Care

This research will add to a larger body of work within anthropology that is documenting diverse “cultures” in healthcare worldwide. Until the 1980s, many Anthropologists assumed that modern (Western) healthcare was homogenous and that Globalization distributed the same health practices and attitudes throughout the world (Geest and Finkler 2004). Since the introduction of institutional ethnographies to the discipline by Dorothy Smith in the 1980s, research has proven the contrary; healthcare institutions are highly diverse with distinct “cultures.” Earlier studies of healthcare institutions include Diamond’s work (1986) documenting daily life at nursing homes, and continues today with the work of Vukic and Keddy (2002) researching home-based nursing in Northern Canada, and Geest and Finkler (2004) who perform cross-cultural studies of hospitals throughout Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America.

#### African-Americans and Structural Violence in DC

My research results will directly support the work of Susie McFadden-Resper and Brett Williams (2005) to document African-American life, past and present, in Washington, DC. My research of AIDS care organizations through socio-political and historical lenses will be directly applicable to their work. Since the migration of African-Americans to northern cities during the 1940s and 50s, Blacks in the District have fallen victim to the de-industrialization and stratification of the job market. Furthermore, they have suffered from legal loop-holes that prevented legal protections against racial discrimination as a result of DC’s lack of statehood (McFadden-Resper and Williams 2005). Therefore, high rates of poverty among African-Americans in Washington, DC can be understood in the framework of structural violence (Farmer 2005). My fieldwork will also contribute to Merrill Singer’s (2006, 2001, 1994) research in how structures of violence relate to HIV/AIDS and drug use in urban America.

As a critical medical anthropologist, I will look outward toward the larger social environment and focus on the ways in which social and cultural processes manifest themselves in the development and daily operations of HIV/AIDS health care organizations (Geest and Finkler 2004). How, for example, do certain taboos about HIV/AIDS impact the physical location and look of the organization’s building(s) or its hiring practices?

#### Linkages “Clinical” and Critical Medical Anthropology

When completed, this project will contribute to Community of Hope as well as current work within critical medical anthropology and the anthropological documentation of local structures of violence. Given the high rate of HIV/AIDS in Washington, DC, (especially among African-Americans) it is essential to gain an understanding of the institutions that work in DC communities preventing the spread of the virus and caring for those already infected and affected. As social scientists, policy makers, and people living with HIV/AIDS more clearly conceptualize HIV/AIDS in the District by learning about AIDS care institutions, they will be able to better respond to the epidemic and find more effective solutions.

**IV. Methodology.** What are the specific research questions you plan to ask? What data will you collect and how? How will you analyze the data? How do you plan to use these data to address and resolve your research questions? *Be specific.* (250-500 words maximum)

Following Lassiter's lead (2004), I will take a collaborative approach to ensure that my fieldwork has a direct, positive impact on the organization that I study. During my first days in the field, I will meet with the leaders of Community of Hope to identify ways in which this project can support the work of the organization. They may make suggestions about what kinds of questions and findings are most important to them in meeting their objectives. As a result, I might help enhance the organization's promotional material using data collected during my research.

#### Research Questions

My mini-ethnography will be guided by the following questions:

- What is the history of the organization?
- Where is the organization located and why?
- Has its mission changed over time? How and why?
- Has its structure changed over time? How and why?
- What is the size of the staff, how are staff recruited, and how are they organized?
- Who are the organization heads and how do they interact with staff?
- What is the ethos of staff?
- What motivates staff to work in HIV/AIDS care, and at this organization in particular? What continues to motivate them in their daily work?
- How long do employees stay with the organization?
- Do employees "burn out"? Why?
- How do these factors relate to the institutional ethos?
- What budget restrictions do these organizations face, and how do they prioritize expenses and cope with limited resources?

#### Data Collection Methods

To answer these questions, I will participate in the daily operations of the organization as a trained volunteer. I will volunteer at Community of Hope as an administrative assistant eight hours each week performing administrative and filing tasks. As a volunteer, I will observe and support the staff in their work, allowing me to directly experience the stresses and successes of working within an HIV/AIDS care organization in Washington, DC.

Once I have gained a sense of the organization and developed rapport with staff, I will begin to conduct interviews with various staff members at all levels of the organization. I will interview eight key participants; the questions that I ask will be tailored to the roles that each participant plays. I will ask administrators, for example, to describe how they manage budgetary restraints and expense prioritization, while I will ask volunteers to reflect upon their experiences working in an environment with limited resources under (perhaps conflicting) pressures from both the organization and the clients whom they serve. Each interview will be recorded on a digital audio recorder and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

I will take notes after each volunteer session and after each interview, thus generating a substantial amount of qualitative data on the everyday operations of each organization and about the projects' key participants.

**V. Ethics.** Describe (in 150-200 words) how you will ensure that your research project is conducted with attention to the ethical guidelines of the discipline of anthropology (and your project's particular field within the discipline) and the guidelines of GW's Institutional Review

Board (if your project involves living human beings). For the former, consult the Web site of the American Anthropological Association and its section on research ethics (<http://www.aaanet.org>). For the latter, review GW's IRB guidelines (<http://www.gwumc.edu>)

In order to ensure that this project will involve no harm for the participants, Community of Hope, or their clients, I will follow the guidelines of the Anthropological Code of Ethics throughout this research. I will also make sure the research responds to the GW IRB regulations for non-medical research. I realize that the daily work of my research informants is burdened with ethical challenges related to HIV/AIDS, STIs, drug use, and sexual practices. During site visits and throughout my volunteer work, I will be in direct contact with HIV positive clients who are seeking services at the organizations in this study. To ensure that I treat clients respectfully, I will attend any internal trainings; however, this project does not include attention to the clients in any direct way. The only information on the clients will come from my participant observation notes where, if I must refer to a client in order to record an idea or describe an event, I will use a pseudonym. I will not conduct any formal or informal interviews with them, and I will not record their names, HIV statuses, medical histories, etc.

I will explain my research goals and methods to the people with whom I volunteer, including my key participants. I will ask interviewees to sign a written consent form. To ensure the dignity and privacy of my informants, I will store my data on my home computer with password protection. I will continue to ensure privacy and dignity for participants in any presentation of my results.

**VI. Product.** What kinds of results do you expect to come from the proposed research? (E.g., publishable article, presentation at a professional meeting, film, museum exhibit, etc.).

I will produce a power point presentation for the 2007 Cotlow Award conference, summarizing my research results. I will also create an additional product as agreed with the leaders of Community of Hope. The product will, in some way, support the organization and may include promotional material, an informational article, an op-ed piece for a local newspaper, or a presentation at an internal meeting. I hope to use my findings for future scholarly presentations at conferences such as the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association or the 2007 National Conference on African-Americans and AIDS.

**VII. Schedule.** State clearly your timetable of specific research activities.

This fieldwork will be conducted from July through August 2006.

Week 1

- Meet with organization head(s) at Community of Hope to:
  - finalize my volunteer placement
  - discuss how this project can support the organization with a final product
- Start volunteering: two-three days each week (I will have completed all necessary training beforehand)

Weeks 2

- Identify eight participants and schedule interviews
- Continue volunteering

Weeks 3-4

- Conduct one 1-hour interview with the first five key participants
- Continue volunteering

Weeks 5-6

- Transcribe the five initial interviews
- Perform the final three interviews
- Continue volunteering

Weeks 7-8

- Transcribe the final three interviews
- Analyze the data
- Create materials to support each of the organizations
- Finish volunteering

**VIII. Budget.** Provide a detailed budget for the proposed activities. Among the expenses you may need to include are transportation, room and board, and research supplies. The Cotlow Fund cannot be used to pay tuition or academic fees or to purchase equipment such as cameras or laptops. *Awards range from a few hundred dollars to around \$1500*

Meals for participants	8 participants x \$15 per lunch	\$120
Transportation	\$5.90 metro round trip x 30 trips for volunteering and meetings	\$177
Application Fees	Money Order, Notary of the Public for Volunteer Application and Police Clearance	\$15
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$312</b>

**IX. Staff.** If others are to participate in the project as investigators or assistants, please give their names and qualifications.

None.

**X. Outside Support.** List any other sources of funding for the project, with amounts and restrictions (if any).

None. I will provide my own housing and other living costs.

## **XI. References cited** (one page maximum).

- Diamond T. (1986). "Social policy and everyday life in nursing homes: a critical ethnography." Social Science and Medicine, 23, p. 1287-1295.
- Farmer P. (2005). Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Geest S and K Finkler. (2004). "Hospital Ethnography: Introduction." Social Science & Medicine, 59, p. 1995-2001.
- Lassiter LE, H Goodall, E Campell, and MN Johnson, eds. (2004). The Other Side of Middletown: Exploring Muncie's African American Community. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- McFadden-Resper S and B Williams. (2005). "Washington's 'People Without History'." Transforming Anthropology, 13(1), p. 3-15.
- Singer M. (2006). Face of Social Suffering: The Life History of a Street Drug Addict. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- (1994). "AIDS and the Health Crisis of the U.S. Urban Poor: The Perspective of Critical Medical Anthropology." Social Science Medicine, 39(7), p. 931-948.
- Singer M, G Scott, S Wilson, D Easton, and M Weeks. (2001). "'War Stories': AIDS Prevention and Street Narratives of Drug Users." Qualitative Health Research, 11(5), p. 589-612.
- Vukic A and B Keddy. (2002). "Northern nursing practice in a primary health care setting." Journal of Advanced Nursing, 40(5), p. 542-548.
- Whitman-Walker AIDS Clinic. (2003). "Profile of the Epidemic." 5 Jan 2006.  
<[http://www.wwc.org/hiv\\_aids\\_services/statistics.html](http://www.wwc.org/hiv_aids_services/statistics.html)>

**XII. Transcript.** A copy of your academic transcript (official or unofficial) must be submitted with this form.

See Attached.

**XIII. Permits.** Various permits may be necessary to conduct the proposed research (e.g., research visas, research permits, antiquities permits, Historical Preservation Committee approvals, health forms, research on human subjects forms). Anyone planning to conduct research with humans - even if through an impersonal survey form or using data about humans collected by someone else - must fill out and submit a set of forms about the "protection of human subjects" before undertaking the research. In most cases, if you have been thoughtful about ethical aspects of your research, and you convey this clearly on the forms, the Committee will speedily approve your project.

The forms are available on the Web: <http://www.gwumc.edu/research/human/htm>. Unless you are doing biomedical research, you should use the forms labeled "non-

medical." If you have questions, there is a phone number on the Web to call, but please do so only after carefully reading the instructions, trying your best to proceed according to the guidelines, and seeking advice from anthropology professors.

If you have the requisite paperwork, attach copies to this application; if you do not yet have it, summarize the steps you have taken to obtain it. If no permits or committee approvals are necessary, state that below.

I will immediately begin to request expedited review for this project from GW's IRB.