



# Integrating Creative Writing and Anthropology in General Education: A Better Approach to Cultural Understanding and Critical Thinking

**Hui Zheng\****University of International College, Macau university of Science and Technology, China*

**\*Corresponding author:** Hui Zheng, University of International College, Macau university of Science and Technology, China

**Received Date:** November 22, 2024

**Published Date:** November 27, 2024

## Abstract

Integrating creative writing and anthropology into general education enriches students' academic and personal development. This interdisciplinary approach enhances cultural awareness, critical thinking, and self-reflection, equipping students for the complexities of the modern world. While challenges exist, thoughtful planning, faculty collaboration, and innovative curriculum design can address these obstacles, ensuring the success of this transformative educational model.

**Keywords:** Creative Writing; Anthropology; Literary Anthropology; General education; Curriculum; Cultural Understanding; Critical thinking

## Introduction

Why integrate Creative Writing and Anthropology, and how can it be achieved? Anthropology provides a lens to better understand human beings and their diverse cultures. Creative writing, as a literary form, plays a significant role in human expression and understanding. To address the research question, the first step is to investigate the current structure and offerings of creative writing programs. However, accessing data from Chinese universities poses a challenge, as they do not disclose detailed study plans on the websites. American universities often make their program details publicly available online, allowing for easier data collection. Therefore, this study focuses on data derived from creative writing courses offered by American universities. To identify specific institutions for analysis, I referred to the "Best Writing in the Disciplines" ranking from U.S. News & World Report, under the category of Education. This ranking list 22 universities, which serve as the basis for this research.

Based on the data collected, current creative writing programs in the US can generally be categorized into two modes. (1) Academic

Mode. This mode is exemplified by Harvard University, where creative writing classes are accessible to all students. Harvard offers four types of writing courses: Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry, and Writing for Screen and Stage. Within these categories, students can choose from 17 different classes, each capped at 12 students to maintain a small class size and personalized learning environment. (2). Industrial Mode. Gotham Writers Workshop represents the industrial mode. Its course fees vary depending on the format, including NYC onsite classes, online classes, and Zoom-based classes. Students can also select different class durations, such as 10-week workshops, 6-week courses, and selling class, intensives. Gotham offers seven types of writing courses: Fiction, Nonfiction, Screenwriting, Comedy, Poetry & Songwriting, Professional Development, Essentials, Teen classes, and Writing for Screen and Stage. In total, 84 different courses are available, with onsite classes typically capped at 14 students.

By analyzing these two modes, I aim to explore how creative writing programs are structured and delivered, providing insights

into the integration of creative writing with other disciplines such as Anthropology.

## Discussion

### The relations between Anthropology, Literary Anthropology and Creative Writing

By Franz Boas in the early 20th century, Anthropology is divided into four main fields: Archaeology, Biological Anthropology, Linguistics, and Cultural Anthropology. Cultural Anthropology is particularly concerned with how people interact with their physical and social environments and how these interactions are shaped by their cultural beliefs and practices. By studying these dynamics, anthropologists aim to uncover the underlying structures that define societies, both past and present [1]. Within Cultural Anthropology, Literary Anthropology has emerged as a unique subfield. First introduced by Paul Stoller, literary anthropology examines how literature and ethnographic methods intersect to provide new perspectives on human culture. There are three branches of this subfield identified [2].

#### Using Literary Texts as Ethnographic Source Material

Historical anthropologists analyze literary works to gain insights into the cultural and societal contexts of specific periods. For example, novels, poems, and plays can serve as valuable records of societal norms, values, and conflicts.

#### Employing Literary Techniques in Ethnographic Writing

Ethnographers incorporate literary elements such as metaphor and narrative subversion into their work. This method not only enriches the presentation of anthropological findings but also makes them more accessible and engaging for broader audiences.

#### Analyzing Literary Production and Practices Anthropologically

Anthropologists study the cultural processes behind the creation and consumption of literature, exploring how narratives reflect and influence societal structures. By merging literature and anthropology, literary anthropology offers fresh methodologies for understanding human experience. While in literacy anthropology, creative writing certainly plays a crucial part.

### Benefits of Integrating Creative Writing and Anthropology

#### Cultivating Cultural Awareness and Empathy

Storytelling combined with ethnographic methods encourages deeper engagement with cultural complexities. For instance, writing narratives based on anthropological observations fosters an appreciation for different worldviews [3]. The role of writing as a bridge for understanding cultural differences. Writing allows students to articulate their own and others' experiences, connecting personal narratives to broader cultural frameworks [4]. Literature and anthropology together provide profound insights into human diversity. This combination enhances empathy by revealing the intricacies of cultural dynamics [5].

#### Building Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills

Writing compels students to interpret complex, culturally

mediated realities, challenging assumptions and fostering critical analysis [6]. Literary texts can be used as ethnographic data, allow students to analyze cultural narratives critically. For instance, examining the societal implications of a novel's themes sharpens students' analytical lenses [7]. Creative writing workshops focusing on cultural contexts train students to critique societal structures and narratives, further enhancing their analytical skills [8].

#### Preparing for Globalized, Interdisciplinary Challenges

Combining creative writing with anthropology prepares students for global citizenship by fostering an understanding of cultural interconnectedness [9]. The importance of stories as markers of identity and evaluate the generation of narratives within and about stories [10]. Highlight the role of inclusive, anthropologically informed education in addressing global challenges. Integrating creative practices enables students to navigate diverse cultural and professional landscapes [11]. When used alongside anthropological theory, creative writing helps students articulate global issues and reflect on different cultural perspectives, which is critical for engaging with globalized challenges in their academic and professional futures [12].

#### Developing Personal and Social Identity

Writing helps students reflect on their identities within societal and cultural contexts, allows students to examine how their individual experiences intersect with cultural narratives, fostering deeper self-awareness. Writing helping students understand their own social identities [13]. Storytelling aids in articulating personal experiences while linking them to larger social frameworks. Storytelling and creative writing within an anthropological context enable identity exploration, helping students understand their roles in society [14,15].

### Strategies of Integrating Creative Writing and Anthropology

To implement the integration of creative writing and anthropology, educators can adopt several strategies: (1) Interdisciplinary Courses. Design courses like "Ethnographic Creative Writing" to teach students ethnographic methods alongside creative writing techniques. These courses encourage analysis and creative engagement with cultural phenomena. (2) Ethnographic Storytelling Projects. Assign projects where students craft narratives based on cultural observations, blending anthropological research with creative storytelling to highlight cultural complexities. (3) Thematic Writing Workshops. Organize workshops around anthropological themes such as identity, migration, or rituals. Pair these workshops with readings from anthropologists and literary authors to inspire nuanced, creative exploration. (4) Fieldwork-Based Writing Assignments. Encourage students to conduct ethnographic research and express their findings through creative formats like short stories, poems, or multimedia projects. (5) Collaborative Cross-Disciplinary Projects. Facilitate collaboration between creative writing and anthropology departments through joint courses, lectures, or team-based projects. (6) Digital and Visual Storytelling. Leverage digital tools like blogs, videos, and multimedia platforms to document and share anthropological findings creatively. This approach enhances digital literacy while enriching students' storytelling capabilities.

## Conclusion

Despite the benefits, integrating creative writing and anthropology into general education presents several challenges:

- (1) **Disciplinary Differences.** Anthropology and creative writing come from distinct traditions: the former focuses on empirical research, the latter on imagination and expression. Reconciling these approaches requires careful planning.
- (2) **Curricular Complexity.** Designing interdisciplinary courses that balance depth and representation of both disciplines is difficult. Faculty collaboration is crucial to avoid oversimplification or imbalance.
- (3) **Student Expectations.** Students may struggle to reconcile the factual nature of anthropology with the imaginative aspects of creative writing. Preparing them for interdisciplinary thinking is essential.
- (4) **Assessment Challenges.** Evaluating work that combines creative and analytical elements requires clear, interdisciplinary rubrics that honor both creativity and intellectual rigor.
- (5) **Resource Constraints.** Developing these courses demands significant time, funding, and faculty expertise. Collaborative efforts between departments are vital but can be hindered by logistical limitations.

Integrating creative writing and anthropology into general education enriches students' academic and personal development. This interdisciplinary approach enhances cultural awareness, critical thinking, and self-reflection, equipping students for the complexities of the modern world. While challenges exist, thoughtful planning, faculty collaboration, and innovative course design can address these obstacles, ensuring the success of this transformative educational model.

## Acknowledgment

The financial support of the National Social Science Fund of China Major Program "Literature Translation, Arrangement and Research of the Frontiers of Creative Writing Theory in the World" (23&ZD294) is acknowledged.

## Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

## References

1. RS (2023) The Role of Anthropology in Understanding Culture and Society. *International Research Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 11(3): 1-3.
2. Wiles E (2018) Three branches of literary anthropology: Sources, styles, subject matter. *Ethnography* 21(2): 280-295.
3. AL Gharib M (2020) A Convergence between Anthropology and Literature: How Reading, Writing, and Ethnography Intertwine. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 9(5): 91.
4. Wulff H (Ed.) (2017) *The Anthropologist as Writer: Genres and Contexts in the Twenty-First Century* (1st ed.). Berghahn Books.
5. Craith MN, Kockel U (2014) Blurring the Boundaries between Literature and Anthropology. A British Perspective. *Ethnologie Française* 44(4): 689.
6. Barton D, Papen U (Eds.) (2010) *The Anthropology of Writing. Understanding Textually Mediated Worlds.* (2011). *Journal of Writing Research* 3(1): 69-71.
7. Hemer O (2016) Writing and Methodology: Literary Texts as Ethnographic Data and Creative Writing as a Means of Investigation. In: Wildermuth N, Ngomba T (eds) *Methodological Reflections on Researching Communication and Social Change. Palgrave Studies in Communication for Social Change.* Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
8. Salesses M (2021) *Craft in the real world: rethinking fiction writing and workshopping.* New York, Catapult.
9. Wulff H (2019) *Rhythms of Writing* (1st Edition). Routledge.
10. U Kockel, M Nic Craith, Máiréad Nic Craith (2006) *Cultural Heritages as Reflexive Traditions.* Palgrave Macmillan.
11. Nielsen M (2017) Nielsen & Rapport (2018) - *The Composition of Anthropology. How Anthropological Texts Are Written.* Routledge.
12. Gottlieb A (2015) *Anthropological Writing.* Elsevier EBooks pp. 740-745.
13. Mura D (2018) *A stranger's journey: race, identity, and narrative craft in writing.* The University of Georgia Press.
14. Simonelli J (2007) The Active Voice: Narrative in Applied and Activist Anthropology. *Anthropology & Humanism* 32(2): 156-170.
15. Chao S (2023) To write or not to write? *American Ethnologist.*