



# NEAA NEWSLETTER

## **Work, Retirement, and Community: Changing Social and Economic Landscapes in the United States**

*Caitrin Lynch, Assistant Professor of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, Olin College of Engineering, and Visiting Research Associate, Brandeis University, Department of Anthropology Caitrin.Lynch@olin.edu*

On any weekday morning, one is likely to find Rosa Finnegan, Jim Downey, and Esther Martin at Vita Needle Company in the center of Needham, Massachusetts (a Boston suburb). Rosa would be working the machine that is affectionately nicknamed the “Rosamatic” due to her skill at operating it. She would be imprinting numbers onto stainless steel needle hubs with this machine. Jim may be preparing to sand down “burrs” on needle shafts that he had earlier cut to size. And Esther would likely be assembling finished needles into packets to ship to France. Perhaps this scenario sounds like a common manufacturing plant scheme, except when you realize that Grace, Jim, and Esther are in their 70s, 80s, and 90s. The average age at Vita Needle Company is 75, and the eldest worker is a 96-year-old former waitress who joined

the company when she was 85—leaving a Cape Cod retirement that she found to be lonely.

If it was during summer 2008, you also may have found me, perhaps packaging needles alongside Esther, or being trained by Rosa to work the Rosamatic. I am three years into an ethnographic research project that engages questions about work, aging, gender, community, social values, and business profitability by examining the motivations and experiences of workers and employers at Vita. As U.S. senior citizens face dwindling retirement savings and rising costs of living, many seek work that simultaneously satisfies their social and economic needs. This study comes at a critical time--when social and economic changes in the U.S. and Europe challenge us to examine our cultural assumptions about the value of work, the experiences of retirement, and what constitutes "successful aging."

*Continue on page 10*

### **Table of contents**

Working, Retirement and Community	Caitrin Lynch	1
Message from the Editor	Jessica Skolnikoff	2
49 <sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting Information	Rhode Island College	3
49 <sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting Forms	Rhode Island College	4-7
Undergraduate Experience at the NEAA	Heather Slivko-Bathurst	8
2008 Conference Recap	Angela M. Labrador	10

## Message from the Editor

It has been great to hear both professors and students already talking about putting together panels at this year's NEAA conference. It is creating an early buzz which I think will help us draw more people this year.

As you know from the last newsletter, I am very excited about having this year's conference in my home state and at a Rhode Island College (RIC). When I first started at Roger Williams University in 2000 I was the lone anthropologist; in search of "my people", I reached out to a faculty member at RIC who responded in kind. This spirit of collegiality, RIC's expertise in hosting the conference, and their enthusiasm for the NEAA will make this year's conference GREAT. Furthermore, even though March in the Ocean State may keep most of you away from the beaches, there is still lots to explore. Providence may be a small city but it packs a punch with a lot of good restaurants and interesting neighborhoods to explore.

In this newsletter I am pleased to include comments from our current undergraduate and graduate representatives. We are hoping this will become a regular addition, one of several initiatives by Matt Trevett-Smith (our new Membership Coordinator) that we are supporting. I think you will all enjoy Caitrin Lynch's article *Work, Retirement, and Community: Changing Social and Economic Landscapes in the United States*. It is particularly timely and in an area in which anthropologists can really make a difference.

Best wishes to all for a happy and healthy 2009. I cannot wait to see everyone in Providence in March.

Jess Skolnikoff  
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**NEAA ANNUAL MEETING**  
March 13-14, 2009  
Rhode Island College, Providence, RI  
For details [neaa.org](http://neaa.org) or email [NEAAConference@ric.edu](mailto:NEAAConference@ric.edu)

# Northeastern Anthropological Association

49<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
March 13 & 14, 2009

Rhode Island College, Providence, RI

## *The Challenges of Exploring Diversity*

***Abstract and Session Proposals due on February 6, 2009.***

### An invitation:

You are invited to attend and actively participate in topical sessions, workshops and programs organized by the Northeastern Anthropological Association at its 49<sup>th</sup> annual meeting. This year's conference will be held on Friday, March 13 and Saturday, March 14, 2009 on the campus of Rhode Island College in Providence, Rhode Island.

The 2009 theme, *The Challenges of Exploring Diversity*, highlights anthropology's commitment to understanding the multiple histories, alternative languages, diverse cultures and varied biological expressions that now define us. Only 150 years ago Charles Darwin published On the Origin of Species (1859). Come listen to our keynote speaker, Dr. Ken Miller, who will help us celebrate this anniversary and the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth at the NEAA Saturday evening banquet.

We welcome proposals for symposia, poster sessions, abstracts or workshops that will stimulate discussion. We look forward to helping you organize programs to highlight ideas and discoveries, to cross disciplinary boundaries or to test conventional wisdom. The NEAA remains a regional conference for students and professionals. It creates accessible forums to meet or reconnect with acquaintances, near and far.

**For Forms and Registration: [www.neaa.org](http://www.neaa.org)**

### For Additional Information:

- Programs and Sessions: Dr. Praveena Gullapalli ([NEAAConference@ric.edu](mailto:NEAAConference@ric.edu))  
Dr. E. Pierre Morenon ([NEAAConference@ric.edu](mailto:NEAAConference@ric.edu))
- Local Arrangements: Dr. Peter Allen ([NEAAConference@ric.edu](mailto:NEAAConference@ric.edu))
- NEAA 2009 Conference Details at Rhode Island College: <http://www.ric.edu/neaa2009>

**CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM**

Email completed forms to: NEAAConference@RIC.edu

49th Annual Meeting of the NEAA      March 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>      Rhode Island College

This form is for conference registration for the 2009 NEAA meetings and for NEAA membership. You must register to attend the 2009 NEAA meetings and all registrants must be NEAA members. Registration must be completed before presentation proposals will be accepted. PLEASE FILL OUT ONE FORM PER REGISTRANT. Please use your PERMANENT ADDRESS.

Name (Last):	<input type="text"/>	(First):	<input type="text"/>		
Address:	<input type="text"/>	Affiliation:	<input type="text"/>		
City:	<input type="text"/>	State/Province:	<input type="text"/>	Postal Code:	<input type="text"/>
Phone:	<input type="text"/>	Fax:	<input type="text"/>	E-mail:	<input type="text"/>

**CONFERENCE FEE and NEAA MEMBERSHIP DUES**

**Employed Professionals :**      **Check box**       **\$65.00**  
 (includes \$40 conference fee and annual \$25 NEAA membership dues)

**Students, Adjuncts & Avocationals:**      **Check box**       **\$ 40.00**  
 (includes \$25 conference fee and annual \$15 NEAA membership dues)

**Please check here if this is a membership renewal**  **or here for new membership in the NEAA**

**PLEASE CHECK THE DINNER OPTION(S) OF YOUR CHOICE**

NEAA BANQUET, (March 14<sup>th</sup>, Keynote address to follow)

Non-vegetarian	Professional	<input type="text"/>	<b>\$ 30.00</b>
Non-vegetarian	Student	<input type="text"/>	<b>\$ 20.00</b>
Vegetarian	Professional	<input type="text"/>	<b>\$ 30.00</b>
Vegetarian	Student	<input type="text"/>	<b>\$ 20.00</b>

RECEPTION (March 13 <sup>th</sup> )	Free, Cash	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
	Bar	
RECEPTION (March 14 <sup>th</sup> )	Free, Cash	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
	Bar	

**TOTAL:**

Email this completed form to: NEAAConference@RIC.edu. If you would prefer, you may print the completed form and mail it with payment to NEAA, Department of Anthropology, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI 02908. Questions about your registration should be emailed to NEAAConference@RIC.edu.

**Payment – please check one:** Check  PayPal

**ABSTRACT SUBMISSION FORM**

49<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the NEAA

*Abstracts are due by* February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009

March 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>

Rhode Island College

Please note that a completed registration form must accompany this abstract form.  
This includes membership in the NEAA for 2009.

Please complete and SAVE this form, then EMAIL it as an ATTACHMENT to:

[NEAAConference@RIC.edu](mailto:NEAAConference@RIC.edu).

Paper/Poster Title:

Author(s):

Address:

Affiliation:

City:

State/Province:

Postal Code:

Phone:

FAX:

Email:

Subfield:

Area:

Three Key Words:

Paper  or Poster  ?

Is this paper part of an organized session Yes  No  ?

Name of Session:

Name(s) of Organizer(s):

Audio-visual requirements:

VCR  PowerPoint  Other (describe)  .

PowerPoint presentations must be available on a flash drive or CD.

Abstract (200-word maximum)

All papers submitted by undergraduates must be accompanied by a note from the student's advisor or a professor from their department, indicating that the work is an original piece and that the professor believes it to be appropriate for presentation at the conference.

Email this completed abstract form to: [NEAAConference@RIC.edu](mailto:NEAAConference@RIC.edu). If you would prefer, you may print the completed form and send it with your completed registration form and payment to NEAA, Department of Anthropology, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI 02908. Questions about your registration should also be emailed to [NEAAConference@RIC.edu](mailto:NEAAConference@RIC.edu). Dr. Praveena Gullapalli and E. Pierre Morenon are coordinating registration and scheduling sessions.

**SESSION PROPOSAL FORM**  
49th Annual Meeting of the NEAA  
College

*Proposals are due by* February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009  
March 13<sup>h</sup> – 14, 2009 Rhode Island

Please note that abstract and registration forms for each presenter must accompany this session proposal. Session organizer(s) must secure and forward all abstracts and registration forms for session presenters.

Please complete and SAVE this form, then EMAIL it as an ATTACHMENT with accompanying abstract and registration forms to: [NEAAConference@RIC.edu](mailto:NEAAConference@RIC.edu).

Paper/Poster title:

Author(s):

Address::

City:

E-mail:

State/Province:

Phone:

Affiliation:

Postal code:

Fax:

List the participants of the session below. A session is limited to 6 presenters. Alternative formats (a roundtable discussion of shorter papers, workshop, meeting or luncheon) that fit into two hour time blocks are encouraged.

1. **Name:** Affiliation:

Address/Phone/Email:

Paper title:

2. **Name:** Affiliation:

Address/Phone/Email:

Paper title:

3. **Name:** Affiliation:

Address/Phone/Email:

Paper title:

4. **Name:** Affiliation:

Address/Phone/Email:

Paper title:

5. **Name:** Affiliation:

Address/Phone/Email:

Paper title:

6. **Name:** Affiliation:

Address/Phone/Email:

Paper title:

Audio-visual requirements:

VCR    PowerPoint    Other

Abstract (200-word maximum)

Session organizers must compile all presentations using PowerPoint/computer media on one flash drive or CD. Email this completed form to: [NEAAConference@RIC.edu](mailto:NEAAConference@RIC.edu). If you would prefer, you may print the completed form and send it with payments to NEAA, Department of Anthropology, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI 02908. Questions about your registration should be emailed to [NEAAConference@RIC.edu](mailto:NEAAConference@RIC.edu). Dr. Praveena Gullapalli and Dr.E. Pierre Morenon are coordinating registration and scheduling sessions.

**2009 NEAA Student Paper Competitions:  
M. Estellie Smith Graduate Paper Prize  
John Omohundro Undergraduate Paper Prize  
NEAA Poster Paper Prize**

Each year the NEAA awards prizes of \$200 each to the best graduate and undergraduate papers presented at the annual meeting. *Beginning this year an award will also be given for the best undergraduate and graduate student poster papers.* All awards are announced at the conference. Guidelines for submissions are as follows:

1. Separate graduate and undergraduate prizes are awarded for both podium and poster papers. The abstracts are published in the NEAA newsletter and publication of the articles in professional journals may be facilitated.
2. To be eligible, the podium and poster papers must be presented in a conference session by the author at the 2009 NEAA meetings in Providence, Rhode Island. Please make sure to complete registration and abstract forms.
3. The papers may be in any sub-field of anthropology and can be given in French, Spanish or English.
4. For the Smith and Omohundro prizes, only the “conference version” of the paper (i.e. the podium version that is actually read) is eligible; this is a paper of 8-12 pages, double spaced, exclusive of bibliography. The bibliography should be included with the paper.
5. For the NEAA poster paper prizes a 2 page, double-spaced, summary of the poster must be provided to express the entrants interest in having their poster judged at the meetings.
6. Conference version podium papers and poster paper summaries must be submitted by March 6, 2009 via email or snail-mail to:

Pierre Morenon, PhD  
Anthropology Department  
Rhode Island College  
Providence, RI 02908 U.S.A.  
pmorenon@ric.edu
7. A cover page must be attached with the author’s name, address, phone number, email address, institution, department and program. Entrants must also specify the competition (graduate or undergraduate, podium or poster) that they are entering.
8. Shared student authorship papers are eligible provided that the category in which they are entered (i.e. undergraduate or graduate) is that appropriate for the most senior author. Papers co-authored with professionals are not eligible for the competition.
9. All papers submitted by undergraduates must be accompanied by a note from the student’s advisor or a professor from their department, indicating that the work is an original piece and that the professor believes it to be appropriate for presentation at the conference. (Such a note is required for all undergraduate papers at the conference)
10. The submissions will be evaluated by a panel of judges under the direction of the President-Elect of the NEAA. This panel convenes during the annual conference.

## Undergraduate Experience at NEAA

Last year, my sophomore year of college, was my first experience attending the NEAA Conference. It was held at the UMass Amherst campus and a group of students and I from SUNY New Paltz headed up the night before, somewhat puzzled as to what to expect and, at the same time, excited to see “anthropologists in action”.

The NEAA Conference, like many conferences, is organized so that it is impossible to attend all of the presentations. This is understandable and attests to the number of professors and other researchers that are present. It is also helpful in that it forces us as students to choose the research topics that we are most interested in learning about. For instance, at the end of the first day, a friend of mine who attended the conference realized that she had attended every presentation on primatology. “Maybe it’s a sign,” she said. For those of us considering anthropology as a career, conferences are the perfect opportunity for us, as undergrads, to start to figure out which direction we want to go in, whether it’s in graduate school or directly into the workforce.

Even more importantly, conferences give us the opportunity to network, something that I had previously thought was only necessary for students majoring in business or marketing. Our generation of anthropologists is important. I don’t mean that in the sense that we are *the* important generation. What I do mean is that what we do is going to directly affect what the next generation does, just as with the generation of anthropologists before us. Professors, those who are directly responsible for guiding us through the process of becoming this next generation of anthropologists, understand that. They understand how important it is for us to become interested in their research, because we are the ones who are going to carry the research forward. This is why networking is so important. Because professors are looking for us just as much as we’re looking for them! However, it is our responsibility as students to approach with interest.

I’m not saying that attending the NEAA Conference is going to decide your life path for you. It might, however, give you the tools and the courage to start thinking about it. I’m twenty years old, and the last thing I want to do is think about the rest of my life, outside of the comforts of college, but in complete truthfulness, the NEAA Conference really did allow me to see that it might not be that bad. I love anthropology, and I know I’m not alone. I saw that at the conference, where for two days, there was a buzz in the air as students, professors and researchers ran around trying to navigate from one presentation to the other. It was amazing being in an atmosphere where there was a common goal. This year, the other students and I have already started planning our trip to the 2009 NEAA Conference in Rhode Island. Some who didn’t even attend last year’s are just as excited as those who did! Whoever comes, I know they won’t be disappointed and I can’t wait to share the experience with them.

**Heather Slivko-Bathurst**  
**SUNY New Paltz**  
**NEAA Undergraduate Representative**



*Continued from page 1*

## ***Work, Retirement, and Community: Changing Social and Economic Landscapes in the United States***

We all know that there is more to work than the paycheck. Work can enable community-building, provide a sense of contribution, and offer a respite from domestic troubles. This project increases our understanding of the important social and cultural dimensions of work by studying working senior citizens, usually viewed as “nontraditional” workers. When we shift the analysis from younger workers to older workers, our understanding of the role, meaning, and experiences of work--as well as our understanding of aging--changes. Gender is also threaded throughout my analysis as I document how elderly men's and women's differing past experiences and current socioeconomic situations, as well as our society's gender norms and expectations, affect experiences and understandings of work and aging.

My writing about Vita and the senior citizens who work there has three themes: work, community, and belonging; labor and capital; aging and work in a global perspective.

1) Work, community, and belonging. In U.S. society, where paid work is integral to one's sense of self-worth and value, non-working adults (retirees, “housewives,” the unemployed) struggle to develop a sense of value. Vita employees repeatedly mention “community” in regards to their workplace. Many scoff at the idea of living in a retirement community or going to a senior center--with “old people.” For them, Vita offers a community of people working toward a common goal and on challenging problems in a workplace with flexible scheduling and with coworkers who are active, productive, and not “old.” My study adds to our understanding of community by studying senior citizens who actively construct community at work.

2) Labor and capital. This project builds on my past research on gender, work, and globalization in Sri Lanka, which also involved factory-based fieldwork and resulted in the publication of my book *Juki Girls, Good Girls: Gender and Cultural Politics in Sri Lanka's Global Garment Industry* (2007, Cornell University Press). My *Juki Girls* project and this project investigate how employers and employees use industrial production to achieve ends other than the obvious (e.g., for the employers it is not simply profit; for the workers it is not simply a paycheck). Vita workers and employers claim that eldersourcing (employing a workforce of older adults) is a net positive, economically and socially. While some employees claim to need money, all say they want social contact. Vita's president explains that he employs older workers as a social good--to counter adverse health impacts of isolated old age. Yet he and observers invariably note the success of this business model. In fact, Vita has received international recognition for staffing a factory with senior citizens. While there may appear to be a contradiction between economic profit and social profit, Vita employers and employees daily inhabit and make sense of this apparent contradiction. By analyzing the relationships between community and business profitability, I aim to move analyses of labor and capital beyond dichotomies of exploited and exploiters, victims and agents--the very dichotomies I argued against in *Juki Girls*.

3) Aging and work in a global perspective. As the global population grows, healthcare improves, and birthrates drop, the world is getting older. Policymakers worldwide anticipate social and economic crises--more old people, fewer young people and state resources to support them, and

longer periods of "unproductive" retirement. Scholars anticipating these crises tend to be in policy studies or economics, and they use quantitative measures to analyze opportunities and quantifiable standard-of-living outcomes. My qualitative methodology and deep focus on a single workplace, however, provides an analysis of the more humanistic side of this issue: values, meanings, and the insights we gain by understanding the struggles and victories of particular people.

Policymakers also ask if older workers are an untapped labor source in this "graying society." Since the Industrial Revolution, manufacturing facilities have moved around the world in search of cheaper labor. This so-called "race to the bottom" has feminized the worldwide industrial labor force. Vita has been able to remain in the U.S. because of its small production volume, quick turn-around time, and proximity to customers. But an additional factor is its staffing model: it is economical to eldersource part-time employees without paying health or retirement benefits. I examine the parallels between eldersourcing and the global feminization of labor, thus adding to scholarship on global labor dynamics. In both cases, cheap labor is enabled by deep-seated cultural assumptions, and employers consider the workforce disciplined and eager and the paycheck a supplement to other support (in the Vita case, Medicare, Social Security, retirement savings, and adult children).

Anthropologists who specialize in the world of work have a critical role to play during the current economic downturn--we can lend our analytical insights to understanding the histories, experiences, and possible futures as people worldwide make sense of and respond to dramatically changing socioeconomic landscapes. In this climate, I hope my study will contribute to the body of academic and policy research on how the U.S. and other societies will support (both economically and socially) an aging population in future years; the mechanisms needed for and benefits of raising the age of retirement; and how to keep older adults engaged in meaningful activity.

## 2008 Conference Recap

Approximately three hundred anthropologists attended the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Northeastern Anthropological Association March 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> 2008 at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Over 180 papers and posters were organized into 39 sessions, including several roundtables and film screenings, around the theme “Anthropology Comes Home: The Enduring Promise of a Holistic Discipline.” Participants hailed from more than 50 institutions from New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Ontario, Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and as far away as Italy.

As a graduate student assisting conference organizer Ventura R. Pérez, I was impressed with the diversity in research interests and career stages represented at the meeting. Over the course of three days, I enjoyed easy and lively conversations with fellow graduate students; impressive undergraduates; and junior, senior, and emeritus faculty. In some moments I found the meeting not only engaging but also – *gasp* – relaxing! It’s a rarity for a professional organization’s annual meeting to evoke such a response in me, but that’s exactly where NEAA meetings can

shine. Amid the excellent presentations and engaging theoretical discussions, there lies a warm undercurrent of intimacy that invites conversation across various divides such as sub-disciplines or career stages.

Thus, as I sat listening to H. Martin Wobst's keynote address, "Archaeologies: Their Anthropological Pasts and Futures," which at its heart queried the future for our entire discipline, I felt an invigorating connection with each person in the room. And that, perhaps, was the greater purpose of the meeting for me as well as its theme – to reflect upon the subdivisions and the connections across the four fields of anthropology while celebrating that we continue to form a professional community that navigates a broad, yet shared, terrain. I look forward to coming together again at the 49<sup>th</sup> annual meeting in Rhode Island!

Angela Labrador  
University of Massachusetts Amherst  
NEAA Graduate Representative

### Quick Facts about our 2009 Conference Host: Rhode Island College

Rhode Island College is located on a 180-acre park-like campus in the Mount Pleasant section of Providence. This location combines a suburban atmosphere with easy access to the benefits and resources of the metropolitan area.

The College now serves approximately 9,000 students in courses and programs both on and off campus.

Rhode Island College is the oldest of the three public institutions of higher education that operate under the aegis of the Board of Governors for Higher Education. The board consists of 13 individuals appointed by the governor. <http://www.ric.edu/aboutRIC/history.php>

#### NEAA NEWSLETTER VOLUME 30 NUMBER 1

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NEAA NEWSLETTER  
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TO JOIN THE NEAA SEND this form and the membership dues to:

Alan Hersker, Treasurer, NEAA  
Department of Anthropology, SUNY Potsdam  
44 Pierrepont Avenue  
Potsdam, NY 13676-2294

**Dues:** \$25.00 for full-time professionals; \$15.00 for students, adjuncts or sessionals.

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Please check if this is a renewal \_\_\_\_\_ and/or change of address \_\_\_\_\_

*MEMBERS RECEIVE 3 ISSUES OF THE NEAA NEWSLETTER PER YEAR AND A REDUCTION ON FEES TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE*