Anthropology in and of the academy: globalization, assessment, and our field’s future
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In considering of the challenges and opportunities faced by social anthropology over the
next twenty years, this talk begins with a recognition of the critical role of institutional
structures and processes, especially practices of evaluation and assessment, in the future
trajectory of our own discipline. The core of the paper critically explores two general
modalities of assessment and evaluation: deliberative processes, of which peer review is a
classic example, and analytical techniques, involving more formal and quantitative
indicators such as citation factors and impact analysis. My discussion draws upon
ethnographic work on and from the midst of such bureaucratic sites, on tracking in some
detail the conflation of descriptive and evaluative practice embedded in the forms of
quantitative metrics, and on current critical examinations of both deliberative and
analytical strategies. The paper argues that deliberative, consultative peer review can lead
to much more acute, textured, and realistic outcomes for such reviews, whether of
programs or individuals, than can bibliometrics. It also suggests that associations such as
EASA have a particular role to play both in arguing for the value of serious collegial
engagement in such work and in modeling, in ways with which anthropologists are
deeply familiar, how such qualitative reviewing be responsibly and productively pursued.

The revised paper will be published later this year in Social Anthropology. In the
meantime, three reports that might be useful for thinking about these issues are currently
available online:

Robert Adler, John Ewing, and Peter Taylor. 2008. Citation statistics: a report from the
International Mathematical Union.
http://www.mathunion.org/publications/report/citationstatistics (last accessed February 3,
2009)

British Academy. 2007. Peer review: the challenges for the humanities and social
sciences. http://www.britac.ac.uk/reports/peer-review/index (last accessed February 3,
2009)

Economic and Social Research Council (UK). 2006. International benchmarking review
of UK social anthropology.
http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCinfocentre/Evaluation/publication/IBR (last
accessed February 3, 2009)