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## PRESS RELEASE

### WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS ANNOUNCES CEDAR AND OTHER 2017 PRAXIS AWARD RECIPIENTS

**WASHINGTON, DC --** The Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists (WAPA) recently announced the recipients of its biennial Praxis Award, bestowed since 1981 for outstanding achievement in anthropological theory and methods for the public good. This year’s honorees were announced at the American Anthropological Association’s 116<sup>th</sup> annual meeting, held in December 2017 in Washington, D.C. There was one winner, and four honorable mentions.

“This was an extremely competitive year, so all awardees were ranked very highly by the panel of jurors,” said Terry Redding, Praxis Award Committee Chair. “In fact, we had five awardees this year, which has not occurred for several years.”

**Adam B. Seligman, Rahel R. Wasserfall, and David W. Montgomery** of the CEDAR (Communities Engaging with Difference and Religion) program, received an Honorable Mention for the project, “Learning to Live with Difference: Taking Anthropology Out of the Classroom and Into the World.”

CEDAR is a global educational network that runs fortnightly programs enabling members of disparate communities to recognize and accept their differences as they work toward a civil society. The group combines a unique, anthropologically informed pedagogy of cognitive learning (lectures), experiential learning (site visits), and affective learning (group work) to build communities that respect difference rather than emphasize sameness. This structure, together with an international and diverse body of fellows, provides an experience that forces participants to challenge their taken-for-granted assumptions about themselves, the “other,” and the terms of interaction, therein creating a new space for living together differently. Unlike other interfaith and inter-communal programs, which play down fundamental dissimilarities between people in favor of emphasizing what they have in common, CEDAR places difference squarely at the top of the agenda. In fact, the key to CEDAR’s approach is the requirement that participants confront one another’s differences—and then learn how to live with them. In two intensive weeks, participants experience unfamiliar religious customs, grapple with beliefs that contradict their own, reexamine lifelong assumptions, and figure out how to share time and space.

“Longitudinal survey data indicate that participants carried the CEDAR experience forward in their careers. And CEDAR team members have published extensively on their theory, method, and experience. That is potentially a huge impact multiplier, insofar as they are producing resources to help other conflict-reduction interventions to understand and implement the CEDAR approach,” said one of the Praxis Award jurors (who remain anonymous). “Helping individuals, groups, and communities recognize and accept difference as an inescapable, inevitable, and, most importantly, acceptable part of our social experience has to be one of the most important projects anyone can pursue these days. I really admire this team’s dedication to what must sometimes feel like an overwhelming problem.”

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Rahel R. Wasserfall is CEDAR's lead anthropologist and Director of Evaluation and Training. She is also a resident scholar at Brandeis University, focusing on evaluation of educational activities in cross-cultural settings.

David W. Montgomery, CEDAR's Director of Program Development, is a former Policy Fellow with the American Association for the Advancement of Science and an Associate Research Professor in Center for International Development and Conflict Management and the Department of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland.

Adam B. Seligman, CEDAR's Founding Director, is a social theorist in the Department of Religion at Boston University, where he teaches courses cross-listed in the Department of Anthropology.

The 2017 Praxis Award was presented to Luisa Cortesi, Yale University, for the competition entry, "Dug-well Revival: Tradition, Knowledge, and Equity in Drinking Water in North Bihar, India."

In the flood-prone areas of North Bihar, India, one of the country's poorest states, development organizations working on drinking water found that bacteriologically contaminated "dug-well" water was easier to clean than "hand pump" water, which was polluted with heavy metals. However, dug-wells are historically characterized by caste-based discrimination, and local peoples largely preferred the modern hand pumps. Ethnographic research revealed, however, that hand pumps, which are promoted by the state and international organizations, are also power-laden, while a dug-well revival can work to promote self-help and community building. Instead of merely supplying a top-down solution, the project chose to engage people in conversations about dug-wells, and encouraged knowledge transmission on how to clean them. As a result, several families started to revive abandoned dug-wells, cleaning and restoring them at their own expense. The state later reimbursed some of the costs for these activities. By engaging people in conversations, the project achieved the independent and equitable revival of dug-wells by their users. The application also described how an outsider, a single, European woman was able to get accepted into communities over the course of several years using patience, cultural awareness, and sensitivity.

Three additional Praxis Award Honorable Mentions were also awarded:

Cathleen Crain, Nathaniel Tashima, Reiko Ishihara-Brito, and Erick Lee Cummings, of LTG Associates, Inc., received an Honorable Mention for the project, "A Video Ethnographic Study: Raising Healthy Children in Poverty and Examples of Excellence in Addressing Childhood Wellness."

The LTG Associates team of anthropologists and a videographer developed two, one-hour long video ethnographies for the California Department of Health Care Service, which were focused on healthy families and communities. They were designed to bring the faces, voices, and worlds of participants into direct relationship with policymakers, program developers, and legislative staff and legislators for the State of California. These videos have been used for briefings, trainings, and policy and program development. The videos were co-created with community leaders engaged in innovative community health projects and parents in poor conditions working to raise healthy children. While this project could have been carried out by other professionals, the anthropological difference began with reframing the community participant-focused research questions to center on families and their lived experience and context. It continued through the identification and recruitment of participants through the use of social networks. The video interviews and the creation of the presentations depicted the lives of individuals were then validated by the participants, closing the loop from interview to data to analysis to final video production.

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Olive M. Minor, International Rescue Committee, received an Honorable Mention for the West African project, “Socio-cultural Barriers and Enablers in the Ebola Response.”

This project aimed to support Oxfam GB’s Public Health Promotion (PHP) addressing the 2014 West African Ebola epidemic. In early November 2014, Minor supported Oxfam’s PHP strategies in Liberia and Sierra Leone by identifying barriers to compliance with Ebola prevention and treatment advice, and by contributing to the development of local-level response activities. She developed rapid qualitative assessments to identify points of friction between Ebola-affected communities and response activities, and offered recommendations for improvements in Oxfam’s strategies. Oxfam PHP teams used these assessments to adjust operations on a daily basis, incorporated recommendations into longer-term strategies, and captured lessons learned for future epidemic responses. Ultimately, this role produced an effective, multi-level engagement with Oxfam’s Ebola response strategy.

Thurka Sangaramoorthy, Department of Anthropology, University of Maryland, and the Project Team, received an Honorable Mention for the project, “Marcellus Shale Public Health Study.”

In 2011, the state of Maryland established an initiative to assist state policymakers and regulators in determining whether and how unconventional natural gas development and production (i.e., fracking) from the Marcellus Shale in Maryland could be accomplished without unacceptable risks to the environment and the populace. To inform policymakers, a state-wide public health impact assessment of fracking, the first of its kind, was commissioned and conducted by a team of interdisciplinary researchers with input from residents and a variety of other stakeholders. The project represents several innovations, such as the utilization of a health impact assessment, which uses participatory research to foster a relatively high degree of control over research by community members and stakeholders and is meant to equalize power within the research process; and the development of a hazard ranking methodology to assess potential public health impacts, which is a valuable tool that allowed the team to systematically evaluate each hazard related to fracking and provide recommendations to minimize the hazards.

For additional details on any of the award recipients, see the WAPA website at <https://wapa.wildapricot.org/2017-Praxis-Award-Recipients>

#### About the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists

The Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists (WAPA) is the oldest and largest regional association of professional anthropologists in the world today. Founded in 1976, WAPA serves as a resource and career development center for anthropologists seeking to apply their knowledge and skills to practical problems for the betterment of society. For more information go to [www.wapadc.org](http://www.wapadc.org).

#### About the Praxis Award

The biennial Praxis Award is a competition for excellence and achievement in translating anthropological knowledge into action. Entries for this international award demonstrate anthropology’s relevance and effectiveness in addressing contemporary human problems, especially for projects in client-based contexts. Applicants are reviewed and rated by a panel of expert anthropological practitioners. The first biennial competition was held in 1981, and today it is one of the most competitive awards in anthropology. For more information and a list of past winners go to at <http://wapadc.org/praxis>.