

ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT CRISIS TOOLKIT – Full Report



AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
Advancing Knowledge, Solving Human Problems



INTRODUCTION

Academic departments of anthropology in the U.S. face mounting challenges, from budget-driven program closures and mergers to political attacks on scholarly freedom. This toolkit is a resource for faculty navigating such crises. It provides legal and advocacy contacts, networks for policy guidance, real-world case studies of departments that survived threats, and practical tools to empower faculty response. The goal is to help anthropology faculty proactively defend their departments and academic freedom with authoritative support and strategies.

UNC GREENSBORO:

In late 2023, UNC Greensboro announced that it was considering dissolving its Anthropology Department as part of budget reductions. Faculty quickly spread the word on social media and reached out to the AAA and other allies. The [AAA responded with a public letter](#) in January 2024 urging UNCG's chancellor to maintain the department, enumerating the ways anthropology contributes to interdisciplinary understanding and the job-ready skills of graduates. Meanwhile, students and alumni launched [a petition on Change.org](#) and a dedicated website "[Save UNCG Anthropology](#)" to rally support and share success stories from colleagues who provided letters of support. In 2023 UNCG increased their external funding, raised Anthropology Major enrollments by 28%, and met expectations outlined by their [Institution](#). Despite meeting these metrics, their program was discontinued without opportunities to merge or transfer faculty. In such a case, threats to Anthropology programs can reflect a tide of DEI defunding and erasure. Understanding the climate of your situation is key in determining next steps and navigating how to engage within your specific university context.

- Read more about this case in "[But we met expectations! Why us?": Threats to anthropology and learning from the program cut at UNC Greensboro](#) by Susan Andreatta, Keri Vacanti Brondo.



LEGAL ASSISTANCE & ADVOCACY

It is important to note that University departments typically do not have independent legal standing to challenge university decisions, such as closure, unless they are legally recognized as separate entities (which is rare). However, faculty members, unions, or professional organizations may have standing to file grievances or legal challenges on the department's behalf. Some of the organizations that specialize in defending faculty rights and academic freedom include:

American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

- The AAUP is a foremost authority on academic freedom and faculty governance. It often intervenes when programs are cut improperly, or faculty are dismissed without due process. The AAUP sets widely [recognized standards, the “Redbook” guidelines](#), which may be mirrored in university handbooks, and provide guidance on best practices.
- The AAUP maintains a [Legal Program](#) that can file amicus briefs in pivotal court cases and sign on to coalition briefs. Faculty facing threats can reach out to [AAUP chapters](#) or the [national office](#) for guidance on mounting a defense.

Academic Freedom Alliance (AFA)

- [AFA](#) is a nonpartisan coalition of faculty members dedicated to upholding free expression and academic freedom. Importantly, AFA offers direct legal support to faculty whose academic freedom rights have been violated or threatened.
- [The AFA recommends contacting them](#) to inquire on faculty membership and to seek help for legal cases.

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

- The [ACLU](#) defends constitutional rights and has taken on cases and advocacy campaigns related to academia. For example, the [ACLU has warned university leaders](#) not to sacrifice academic freedom in response to political pressures. [They provide guidance to universities](#), and many of their affiliates conduct trainings to understand personal rights.



- While the ACLU's involvement may depend on the broader civil liberties implications of a case, it remains a potential ally, especially for public university faculty whose First Amendment rights are at risk with department reorganizations or course content disputes.

Scholars at Risk (SAR)

- [Scholars at Risk](#) is an international network focused on defending the rights of scholars from prosecution. [SAR promotes academic freedom](#) in the U.S. and can provide support or temporary academic positions for faculty whose jobs are eliminated for political reasons. [Joining SAR's network](#) can connect your department with a global community advocating for the freedom to teach and research without fear.

Professional Liability Insurance

- The AAA will soon offer Professional Liability Insurance programs to members to offer protection from potential academic prosecution.

Pro Bono Legal Services

- In addition to the AAUP and the AFA, local legal institutions may be able to offer free legal services in your case. Additionally, [local bar associations may maintain lists of lawyers willing to take on cases pro bono](#).

Understanding Personal Rights and University Policies

- State restrictions implemented by universities are not often done with regard to individual rights, or in line with university policies. By knowing university policy and your rights, you can question restrictive asks, such as providing syllabus content. Faculty senates and academic councils may have established procedures that require consultation or approval before closing a department.
- Many universities have formal procedures for appealing administrative decisions. To become familiar with university policies, review your university handbook, policy webpage, and be on the lookout for policy changes and announcements.
- To find out more information, review your institution's Faculty Senate website, recent minutes, and policies.



Faculty Unions and Legal Defense Funds

- If your campus has a faculty union (whether [AAUP-affiliated](#), [AFT](#), [NEA](#), or independent), utilize it. Unions often provide legal counsel to contest layoffs or program closures that violate contracts.
 - Through collective bargaining agreements, unions can demand that the administration prove financial exigency or follow proper procedures. In the absence of a union, consider forming an [AAUP advocacy chapter](#) to organize faculty and access AAUP national resources.
- General Best Practices Include:
 - Documenting everything (meetings, justifications given for cuts, communications) as this will aid lawyers in building a case if necessary.
 - Seeking legal advice early as legal organizations can not only advise on litigation but also issue strong public statements that pressure administrations to respect academic freedom and due process.
 - Using a personal email account when documenting and connecting with legal counsel.

ACADEMIC NETWORKS & POLICY GUIDANCE

No department should face institutional threats in isolation. Connecting with broader academic networks provides strength in numbers and access to critical policy guidance. Anthropology faculty can leverage their professional organizations and interdisciplinary alliances to navigate challenges.

American Anthropological Association (AAA) Resources:

- The AAA can assist in issuing letters on behalf of academic departments facing closures, mergers, and disruptions. In January of 2024, the AAA President, Whitney Battle-Baptiste, and Executive Director, Ady Arguelles-Sabatier [issued a formal letter to the University of North Carolina Greensboro](#) (UNCG), urging them to reconsider dissolving the Anthropology Department.
- Such letters from a national body can carry significant weight; they act as expert testimony that cutting anthropology is a step backward. The AAA also provides a [Department Services Program \(DSP\)](#) for anthropology departments. Departments enrolled in DSP gain access to resources: these include help with promoting the department's achievements, assistance with curriculum benchmarking, and a forum for department chairs to exchange strategies.



If your department is part of DSP, you have an open channel to AAA staff who can advise on advocacy. [AAA membership](#) and the [Annual Meeting](#) are opportunities to rally anthropologists from other institutions to your cause.

Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA):

- [COSSA is a coalition that advocates for sustainable federal funding](#) of social and behavioral science research that connects scholars across disciplines. While COSSA's focus is at the federal level, it provides policy analysis and advocacy tools that anthropology faculty can repurpose locally. COSSA releases [Hot Topic issue briefs and newsletters](#) on trends affecting social sciences, which can inform talking points about why anthropology is vital in higher education. It also maintains an [Action Center](#) where you can send messages to your Congressional representatives.
- COSSA offers Advocacy Alerts for petition letters that are customizable. COSSA can host petitions on their [Action Alert page](#) on behalf of academic departments and organizations.
- Additionally, [COSSA's data on the economic and societal benefits of social science](#) research can showcase the relevance of social science. Anthropology faculty and students can also participate in [COSSA's annual Social Science Advocacy Day](#), which trains scholars to make the case for their discipline – skills directly transferable to making the case to your university's leadership. The AAA participated in [COSSA's Social Science Advocacy Day in Washington, DC](#) to join with social and behavioral scientists and science advocates from across the country to engage with policymakers.

National Humanities Alliance (NHA):

- The [NHA is a coalition](#) that provides resources to advocate for the humanities on campuses and in public. The [NHA offers a toolkit](#) with strategies to counter declining enrollments and advocate for the humanities in education. NHA also helps organize [Humanities Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill](#) and offers training on how to communicate with policymakers.



If your anthropology department is facing state budget cuts, [NHA's Capitol Hill Advocacy Guide](#) and even [mock meeting scripts](#) for talking to officials can be repurposed to talk to a university president or board. The idea is to frame your arguments in terms administrators understand – retention, return on investment, student demand, and public impact. The NHA's tools can guide you in that reframing. Furthermore, [NHA collects Community Case Studies](#) that show how humanities enrich civic life. Citing these examples, or examples from your own community can strengthen your case that closing the department will hurt not just the campus but also the community beyond.

- AAA participated in NHA's [Humanities Advocacy Day](#) in Washington, DC to meet with Members of Congress and advocate for federal funding for the humanities.

American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS):

- [AAAS is a scientific society](#) that also embraces social sciences. AAAS has been vocal in linking scientific freedom and responsibility to pursue and communicate knowledge without undue restriction.
- [AAAS's Office of Government Relations](#) and it's [R&D Budget Program](#) can provide data on federal research support for social sciences. Demonstrating that anthropology attracts competitive NSF or NIH grants, for example, can be part of your argument to administrators.
- [AAAS convenes the Science and Human Rights Coalition](#), a network of scientific and scholarly societies committed to protecting researchers' rights.
- AAAS has a program to honor scientists who have been persecuted, [the AAAS Award for Scientific Freedom and Responsibility](#), which gives visibility to fights for academic freedom. Engaging with AAAS may open opportunities for interdisciplinary partnerships, which in turn strengthen the department's profile, or provide an option for a departmental merger rather than closure.



Policy Guidance – AAUP & Beyond:

- At the core of navigating institutional challenges is understanding the policies and norms that govern program changes. AAUP's recommended policies, as noted, say that programs **shouldn't be cut arbitrarily or solely for short-term budget reasons**. Faculty should familiarize themselves with their own university's handbook and AAUP guidelines on issues like "financial exigency" and "program discontinuance." Often, administrations are required to follow certain procedures such as providing advance notice, consulting a faculty committee, exploring alternatives before closing a department. If those procedures aren't followed, that can be a point of leverage.
- **The AAUP Policy Documents and Reports, the AAUP "Redbook,"** is a key reference that outlines policies often also found in university handbooks. By citing these **widely accepted principles**, faculty can make a reasoned case to boards or accrediting bodies that a closure decision is improper.
- Anthropology faculty should plug into these networks early. Even a heads-up email to AAA or AAUP when trouble is brewing can set in motion supportive actions. Through collective effort, whether by joining national advocacy campaigns or drawing on shared policy language, your department's fight becomes part of a larger movement to uphold the integrity of education in our field.

CASE STUDIES OF DEPARTMENTAL ADVOCACY

Learning from anthropology programs that have faced existential threats can provide both inspiration and practical insight. Here we present several examples where faculty and allies mounted effective responses to closures, mergers, or funding cuts, based on their unique departmental circumstances.

San Diego State University (SDSU, 1992):

- In 1992 **SDSU's administration, amid a state budget crisis, announced layoffs** of 111 tenured professors – including terminating the entire anthropology faculty. Rather than accept this unprecedented action, the Anthropology Department, led by Chair Dan Whitney, fought back vigorously.



Whitney had a background in law, which helped in organizing a multifaceted campaign. The faculty filed a class-action lawsuit against the university for wrongful termination. They also spearheaded protests on campus and garnered media attention, countering the administration's narrative that cuts were necessary. Importantly, they passed votes of no confidence in the university president, Thomas Day, rallying other departments to the cause. The pressure worked: facing legal challenge and public outcry, SDSU reversed the terminations. Ultimately the anthropology program survived and was rebuilt, and the president who targeted them, Thomas B. Day, eventually resigned.

- Key takeaways: Have a plan on multiple fronts (legal, public, internal governance). Even tenured layoffs can be overturned if they violate procedures or become too controversial. A strong, united department voice, especially with a legal angle, can force administrators to rethink as faculty effectively assert their rights.

University of Akron (Anthropology, 2020s):

- The University of Akron provides a recent case of attempted department elimination bundled in a larger austerity plan. In 2024, Akron's leadership, citing severe enrollment and financial declines, proposed a retrenchment plan [including the closure of the anthropology department](#).
- The presence of a [faculty union at Akron](#) meant that formal processes had to be followed to demonstrate financial exigency. Faculty and the union questioned whether the criteria were truly met and pushed back. [The case got local press coverage](#), framing it as part of a controversial prioritization of certain programs over others. At the time of reporting, clarifications and perhaps negotiations were ongoing.
- Key takeaways: Unions can enforce transparency, forcing administrations to justify their decisions in concrete terms. It also shows the importance of publicizing not just the human cost (jobs lost) but also the academic cost (losing an entire field of study at the university). Akron's story was covered by local media outlets, which potentially pressures the university to find alternatives (like internal transfers of faculty or phased reductions instead of outright closure). Faculty elsewhere can cite such coverage to remind their own administrators that cutting departments can result in negative publicity and community backlash.



Beyond Anthropology – Comparative Examples:

- Sometimes useful lessons come from other disciplines that faced similar challenges:

West Virginia University (WVU, 2023):

- [WVU undertook a highly publicized series of program cuts](#) to address a \$45M deficit, including terminating dozens of programs. While anthropology at WVU was not cut, the process was widely criticized for its speed and lack of faculty input. WVU students staged protests, and national language associations got involved. The WVU case underlines how important it is to insist on meaningful faculty consultation and to present viable alternatives to cuts.
- For anthropology departments, be proactive if you see warning signs such as low-enrollment programs being reviewed. Engage faculty early to explore consolidation rather than elimination, and work to pitch anthropology and career opportunities to administrators looking to develop programs with career readiness in mind.

Illinois Wesleyan University (IWU, 2020)

- [Illinois Wesleyan University \(IWU\) in 2020 decided to eliminate its anthropology major to reallocate resources](#). The AAUP investigated and found the process violated shared governance principles, as financial grounds were a driving factor in program cuts, against governance standards. IWU's remaining faculty strengthened faculty governance rules going forward allowing for potential policy changes to prevent future top-down cuts.

New England's College of Arts and Humanities

- [The University of New England](#) faced possible program eliminations and restructurings, and in response, faculty created a strategic plan to improve their programs' viability. They implemented measures like [interdisciplinary introductory courses](#) and combined capstone seminars to use resources more efficiently. They also worked to highlight stories of [alumni success](#) and planned outreach to undeclared majors based on unique academic opportunities like faculty-led research opportunities.



Each experience reinforces a critical message: action matters. Departments that actively organize, publicly advocate, and seek outside support fare better. Not every attempt will fully succeed, but partial victories such as a reversal, a delayed decision, a phased-down program instead of an abrupt cut, a merger with autonomy preserved, or severance or retirement packages for faculty rather than immediate layoffs, can be achieved. Faculty should document and share their experiences, this toolkit itself is meant to compile such knowledge, so each threatened departments can understand tools at their disposal. By learning from existing resources and experiences, anthropology faculty can utilize resources that best fit their needs.

RESOURCES FROM KEY ORGANIZATIONS

As highlighted throughout, several national organizations are indispensable resources in these fights. Here we provide a quick-reference profile of each, summarizing what materials or help they offer specifically for faculty facing department crises:

American Anthropological Association (AAA)

- [AAA's website](#) and staff provide multiple forms of assistance. Relevant materials include:
- [Letters of Support](#): The AAA writes letters in support of departments or to defend against academic freedom issues.
- Workshops and Webinars: AAA often holds sessions that address topical issues. AAA Members can register for Webinars in advance through the [AAA Community Hub](#).
- AAA's [Department Services Program](#) includes regular meetings of department chairs, which can be a confidential forum to get advice from peers who may have gone through similar threats.
- Contact Points: Know that AAA has a wide reach of connections across our members, and with our sister scholarly associations. We serve our members and can connect you with someone who can point you to the right resources or even join a strategy call with your faculty. We can also alert Section leaders who might have specialized input or be willing to sign on to support letters.



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- AAA is working alongside the *American Council of Learned Societies* (ACLS), its member societies, and the *American Association of University Professors* (AAUP) to provide critical support to faculty, students, and independent scholars affected by new policy shifts in higher education. These partnerships will ensure access to advocacy, institutional backing, and direct resources.
- The AAA is amplifying the actions of sibling societies by signing onto letters pushing back against the Administration's recent attacks, including those from the [Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics](#) in expressing opposition to the unprecedented removal of public data, [the National Institute of Health](#) in support of medical research funding, and speaking up against budgets cuts to [the Bureau of Economic Analysis](#), [the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), and [the U.S. Census Bureau](#). We believe these unified messages send a powerful signal about the scientific community's shared values and determination to protect the integrity of research and evidence-based practice.
- AAA joined with the Society for American Archaeology and other cultural resource organizations [to urge Interior Secretary Doug Burgum to protect and maintain Section 106 regulations](#) of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- Together with more than 45 other organizations, [AAA signed the United Science Alliance's public statement](#) reaffirming our commitment to academic freedom, stable research funding, and policies grounded in scientific evidence.
- To provide substantive, accessible analysis, Carolyn Rouse, our President-Elect, is leading the effort to develop a series of essays focusing on the attacks on race, gender identity, and data purges. Essays are continuously published under our blog series, [Present Tense: Anthropologists Thinking Out Loud](#) a collection that brings anthropological perspectives to the forefront of public discourse and can serve as a teaching resource.
- [Check our events calendar for the latest updates and information on upcoming webinars](#), these sessions will provide concrete strategies and expert insights to support our members in a rapidly shifting landscape



Actions You Can Take as a AAA Member

- Add your signature to petitions and advocacy letters from sister organizations we send your way.
- Attend our upcoming Town Hall, webinars, and [other events](#) to stay informed and engaged.
- Elevate anthropology's role in shaping public discourse by sharing and teaching the [Present Tense collections](#) with your students and the public at large.
- Write an opinion piece for your local newspaper. [Science Homecoming](#) invites scientists to advocate for continued investment in American science by writing opinion pieces for their hometown newspapers. This is a powerful way to highlight how scientific research benefits communities and drives progress.
- [Login to AAA's Community Hub](#) for the updates on everything Anthropology. You'll find advocacy efforts, important information about your Section, activities, opportunities to get more involved, and more.
- [Maintain your AAA Membership in good standing](#). Your engagement strengthens our collective voice and impact.

American Association of University Professors (AAUP):

- [AAUP Redbook](#) : Contains the [Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#), which spell out how terminations and program closures should be handled in an ideal policy scenario. Compare your university's policies to these; if there's a gap, AAUP's standards can be invoked as the gold standard. Also look at reports like ["The Role of the Faculty in Conditions of Financial Exigency"](#) for guidance.
- [AAUP has critiqued Illinois Wesleyan University's bypassing of faculty](#) when cutting academic programs. Such reports are powerful as they are third-party evaluations that you can show to administrators or trustees.



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- AAUP's website also had a [Program Cuts monitoring page](#) during the pandemic era, which may be useful in identifying other targeting programs, and connecting with individuals who have faced department threats.
- The [AAUP may provide an amicus brief](#) if a legal case arises from a department closure. If your fight escalates legally, check with [AAUP's Legal Defense Fund](#). Even without court action, the AAUP may write directly to your university president outlining concerns, which can be very impactful.
- If your campus has an [AAUP chapter or a faculty senate](#), use AAUP's guides to organize faculty discussions. [An AAUP Campus Guide to Academic Freedom](#) can help educate colleagues and students on why this fight matters for the whole campus, not just one department.

Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA):

- [COSSA Washington Update](#): A newsletter that often covers threats to social science. By reading these, you stay ahead of the curve on external threats.
- [Letters and Testimony](#): COSSA frequently coordinates coalition letters to Congress in support of social science. These letters, signed by dozens of organizations, including the AAA, articulate why social sciences are crucial. Quotations from them can be repurposed in your own letters to decision-makers.
- Advocacy Training: [COSSA has an advocacy handbook](#) and [holds webinars](#) that equip scholars to talk about their work to non-specialists.
- State and Local Engagement: While COSSA is DC-focused, it sometimes [covers state-level issues](#). If your issue involves lobbying a state board or legislature, COSSA might have relevant experience or even contacts in that arena.

National Humanities Alliance (NHA):

- [Humanities for All](#): This NHA project collects over 2,000 examples of publicly engaged humanities work, which can be utilized to demonstrate anthropology's relevance.
- [Documenting the Impact Toolkit](#): NHA provides guidance on how to measure and document the impact of humanities programs. Anthropology departments can use these methods to gather their own evidence and include it in reports or appeals.

Society for American Archaeology:

- The [Society for American Archaeology \(SAA\)](#) has launched a campaign urging individuals to share the impact of executive actions on their work with their elected representatives.

The Scholars Rescue Fund:

- [The Scholars Rescue Fund, within the Institute of International Education \(IIE\)](#) primarily assists foreign scholars in danger but has on occasion helped academics in the U.S. facing severe threats to their careers for speaking out.

PRACTICAL GUIDES & TEMPLATES FOR ACTION

Finally, this toolkit supplies practical tools, sample documents and step-by-step guides, so faculty can swiftly organize and respond to threats. Adapting proven templates saves time and ensures your message hits the right notes. Below are key practical resources and how to use them:

Template Strategic Plan for Program Viability:

This kind of document shows your department actively contributing potential solutions. The toolkit includes a fill-in-the-blank strategic plan template following the above outline, which you can customize with your data and ideas. Even if the administration has already announced cuts, presenting such a plan can strengthen the case for giving the department a probationary period to turn things around. [Strategic Plan_2025 Template](#).

Demonstrating Anthropology's Value

Demonstrating the value of an anthropology program is most effective when understanding why your department is facing threats. Below are resources that can help demonstrate the value of anthropology in higher education for a variety of contexts.

- [Anthropology Career Readiness Network \(ACRN\)](#)
 - [Instructor Tools](#) – offers Department Growth & Development, Networking & Relationship Building, and a Career Ready Curriculum Making Connections with Local Organizations, and A Better Anth 101.
 - [What can you do with a degree in anthropology](#)
 - [Boosting Anthropology Enrollments](#)



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- [Career Tools for Anthropology Workbook](#) – bridges the gap between academic training and real-world application for anthropology students and graduates.
- [Departmental Advisory Initiative](#) – A 12-month partnership between ACRN and anthropology departments or programs to build capacity to prepare students for careers in industry, non-profits, and government.
- [National Association for the Practice of Anthropology \(NAPA\)](#)
 - [sNAPAshots](#): Brief videotaped career conversations with professional, practicing, and applied anthropologists.
 - [Mentor Program](#): Provides career information and pairs students, new professionals, mid-level, and senior career changers with professional anthropologists

AAA Section Mentorship and Connection Offerings

- [Association of Latina/o and Latinx Anthropologists](#)
 - ALLA's Mentoring Program pairs faculty and junior scholars based on research interests, region, and subfield to foster a supportive community.
- [Council for Museum Anthropology](#)
 - The Council for Museum Anthropology supports professional development and mentorship for graduate students and young professionals through annual workshops.
- [Council on Anthropology and Education](#)
 - Established scholars in anthropology of education will virtually meet with graduate students and recent graduates to discuss research-in-progress, the [publication process](#), and [foster](#) new ideas and collegial networks.
- [Society for Anthropological Sciences](#)
 - SAS aims to connect students, postdocs, and early career scholars with [senior scholars](#) to build intellectual and social networks.
- [Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges](#)
 - The SACC has Mentors who volunteer to answer questions and connect.
- [Society for Visual Anthropology](#)
 - The [SVA lists Mentors](#) interested in supporting students with interests in studying and practicing Visual Anthropology.



Considering Integrated Majors

- Consider your faculty expertise areas and how they may blend with other programs at your university. Creating multidisciplinary academic programs or [integrated majors](#) can strengthen your students' career readiness and demonstrate value to academic administrators.
- Consider a multidisciplinary approach in which an Anthropology Major can be integrated within your Institution:
 - Anthropology + Technology = User-Experience (UX) Researcher, Geographic Information System (GIS) Specialist
 - Anthropology + Medicine = Public Health Analyst, Clinical Researcher
 - Anthropology + Business = Consumer Market Researcher, Strategic Insights Consultant
 - Anthropology + Biology = Forensic Anthropologist, Anthropometrist
 - Anthropology + Environmental Science = Climate Scientist, Policy and Compliance Evaluator
 - Anthropology + Linguistics = Natural Language Processing Expert, Machine Learning Engineer
 - Anthropology + Archaeology = Cultural Resource Management Principal Investigator, Historic Preservation Planner Anthropology + English = Librarian, Editor
 - Anthropology + Art History = Curator, Archivist
 - Anthropology + Theatre = Filmmaker, Set Designer

Bring Anthropology to Your Community

- Engaging with local organizations can build community buy-in to your program. Consider how your research skills could be utilized to assist a local non-profit, school district, or public organization.
- You can additionally demonstrate that your students are career ready by building partnerships with such organizations and allowing students to work on [client-based class projects](#).

Prepare Speaking Points

Communicating what your department has contributed to within academia, your university, and the community can help bolster defenses against administrative threats. Use the points below to build from and include in your communications.

- [Anthropology Speaking Points_2025](#)



Sample Advocacy Letters:

Letter to University Leadership (President/Provost):

- This template lays out the reasons to preserve the anthropology department. It begins with a statement of understanding of financial challenges, then transitions to why anthropology is uniquely valuable. Make sure to highlight specific contributions of your department such as careers graduates have gone on to, the amount your department receives in grants annually, or ways in which your department uniquely engages with the community. Finally, conclude by recommending strongly that the program be retained or strengthened and offer to meet and discuss alternative solutions.
- [Sample AAA Letter_2025](#)

Email Professional Organizations:

- To demonstrate organization support, review your networks to see which organizations may be able to speak on behalf of your department's value to university administrations. Below are organizations who may be able to assist you:
 - [American Anthropological Association](#)
 - [Your AAA Section American Association of University Professors](#)
 - [Society for American Archaeology](#)
 - [Society for Applied Anthropology](#)
 - [Archaeological Institute of America](#)
- When contacting an organization, make sure to provide a summary of the situation, and specify how the organization can assist you and your goals, whether writing a letter, signing a statement, publicizing the issue, or connecting you with colleagues who may be in, or have been through similar situations and can provide additional support.

Petitions and Resolutions

Sample Student/Alumni Petition Text:

- Consider creating an online petition that anyone can sign for an actionable and impactful goal.
- Include a one-sentence urgent call, and a few short paragraphs explaining the situation, highlighting your department's importance, and outlining the broader implications of cutting or merging a program.



- Review the [University of North Carolina Greensboro's petition](#) as an example of how signatures and stories were collected.
- Once a petition is in motion, share its impact with your administration.

Media and Outreach Tools:

Press Release:

- Consider formatting a press release to be provided to [Inside Higher Ed](#), the [Chronicle of Higher Education](#), a local university paper, or community or regional newspaper. We have provided a template below to get you started.
- [Press Release Template_2025](#)

Social Media Toolkit:

Defending anthropology departments from threats to funding and academic freedom requires a strategic approach to social media engagement. Below are specific best practices, informed by resources from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Faculty First Responders, the Modern Language Association (MLA), and the DePaul University AAUP Chapter.

- Raise Awareness Through Informed Content
 - Share Credible Resources: Regularly post links to authoritative materials that elucidate the importance of academic freedom and current challenges faced by anthropology departments. For instance, the [Academic Freedom Crisis Toolkit](#) offers extensive insights into safeguarding academic rights.
 - Highlight Case Studies: Discuss specific incidents where academic freedom was challenged, emphasizing the outcomes and lessons learned. This contextualizes abstract concepts and underscores the real-world implications of such threats.
- Educate Faculty and Students on Their Rights
 - Utilize platforms to disseminate information about the principles of academic freedom. The [MLA's Tool Kit on Academic Freedom](#) provides foundational knowledge that can be shared in digestible formats.
 - Encourage faculty and students to familiarize themselves with their institution's policies on academic freedom and free speech. The [DePaul AAUP Chapter's guide](#) offers a template for understanding such rights within a university setting.



- Mobilize Collective Action
 - Organize Online Campaigns: Initiate and promote petitions, open letters, or virtual events that advocate for the protection of anthropology departments. Use hashtags to unify messages and increase visibility.
 - Facilitate Networking: Create groups or forums where faculty, students, and supporters can collaborate, share experiences, and strategize responses to potential threats.
- Provide Support for Targeted Individuals
 - Share Resources for Harassment Response: In the event that faculty members face public harassment, direct them to organizations like [Faculty First Responders](#), which offer guidance and support for those targeted due to their academic work.
 - Encourage Use of Institutional Support: Remind individuals to utilize internal channels such as ombudspersons or faculty unions when facing challenges, ensuring they receive comprehensive assistance.
- Advocate for Transparent Communication
 - Demand Institutional Transparency: Use social media to call for clear communication from university administrations regarding decisions that affect academic freedom or departmental funding. Transparency fosters trust and collective problem-solving.
 - Publicize Policy Changes: Inform the community about proposed or enacted policy changes that could impact academic freedom, enabling timely and informed responses.
- Sample Social Media Posts
 - Twitter/X: "Academic freedom is a cornerstone of modern education, stay informed and stand against threats to our departments. [#AcademicFreedom](#) [#AnthropologyMatters](#)"
 - Facebook: "Facing challenges to academic freedom? The [Academic Freedom Crisis Toolkit](#) offers valuable resources to navigate and counter these threats. Let's stand together to protect our disciplines."
 - LinkedIn: "In times where academic freedom faces challenges, it's imperative to be proactive. Familiarize yourself with your rights and available resources. The [MLA's Tool Kit on Academic Freedom](#) is a great starting point."



Documentation Log:

- We include a template log for recording all key events and communications. Should it come to a legal challenge or just for internal memory, you want to know when you were told what, and how you responded. Our log suggests recording dates of announcements, meetings, with minutes, media coverage, etc. Keeping this up to date also helps in writing reports to allies or for AAUP inquiries.
- [Documentation Log Example_2025](#)

Using these practical tools, faculty can react quickly rather than being caught unprepared. Having a template to follow can provide a structure and ensure you don't forget critical elements in your messaging. For instance, in a rush to defend one's program, it's easy to focus only on the internal appeal but forget to include external validation or align with university values.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Faculty in anthropology departments facing closures or related threats are up against challenging odds, but with the right toolkit, they are far from powerless. This comprehensive resource has outlined how to secure legal and advocacy support, tap into new funding streams, leverage professional networks, learn from past victories, and execute a savvy action plan with ready-made tools. The overarching lesson is solidarity and proactivity. Anthropologists excel in understanding human networks and cultural contexts, and these skills are directly applicable to building coalitions and framing arguments to save academic programs.

Remember that defending academic freedom and the integrity of your department is a noble fight that resonates beyond your campus. Even when outcomes are not fully favorable, the stand you take can prompt reforms and draw attention to the value of the discipline. We encourage faculty to share this toolkit widely and connect with the American Anthropological Association for further support.

By coming together, anthropology faculty can ensure that the voices for cultural understanding, human diversity, and critical inquiry remain strong on our campuses. This toolkit equips you with knowledge and concrete resources, the next step is to organize, strategize, and advocate with these tools and connections [within the AAA](#).

SOURCES:

- American Anthropological Association – Advocacy
 - <https://americananthro.org/advocacy/>
- American Association of University Professors
 - <https://www.aaup.org/>
- AnthroSource- “But we met expectations! Why us?”: Threats to anthropology and learning from the program cut at UNC Greensboro
 - <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.28057>
- American Association for the Advancement of Science
 - <https://www.aaas.org/mission>
- American Council of Learned Societies- *Fellowships*
 - <https://www.acls.org/competitions/acls-fellowships/>
- Anthropology Career Readiness Network
 - <https://anthrocareerready.net/>
- American Civil Liberties Union- *University guidance*
 - <https://www.aclu.org/about/aclu-history>
- Academic Freedom Alliance- *Protecting academic freedom*
 - <https://academicfreedom.org/about/>
- Change.org- *Petition to Save UNCG Anthropology*
 - <https://www.change.org/p/support-the-uncg-anthropology-program/c>
- Chronicle of Higher Education, *Press Releases*
 - <https://www.chronicle.com/page/contact-us>
- Consortium of Social Science Associations- *Policy*
 - <https://cossa.org/policy/>
- Faculty First Responders- *Resources*
 - <https://facultyfirstresponders.com/resources-workers/>
- Ford Foundation- *Grants*
 - <https://www.fordfoundation.org/work/our-grants/grant-opportunities/>
- Inside Higher Ed – “*Taking Charge of Program Viability*”
 - <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2022/02/21/faculty-facing-possible-program-closures-can-take-action-opinion>
- Inside Higher Ed- “*One Year After Massive Cuts, West Virginia Is Still Bleeding Faculty, Administrators*”
 - <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty-issues/tenure/2024/09/09/year-after-cuts-wv-still-bleeding-faculty-administrators>



SOURCES CONTINUED:

- International Institute of Higher Education- *Scholars*
 - <https://www.scholarrescuefund.org/for-scholars/>
- Mellon Foundation- *Grants programs*
 - <https://www.mellon.org/grant-programs>
- Modern Language Association
 - https://www.mla.org/tool_kit_on_academic
- National Humanities Alliance –*Advocacy*
 - <https://nhalliance.org/about/>
- National Education Association- *Affiliates*
 - <https://www.nea.org/nea-affiliates>
- National Endowment for the Humanities – *Humanities Initiatives*
 - <https://www.neh.gov/program/humanities-initiatives-colleges-and-universities>
- Save UNCG Anthropology (savetheg.com) – *Support campaign*
 - <https://www.savetheg.com/anthropology>
- Scholars at Risk- *Protecting Scholars*
 - <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/get-help/>
- SDSU Dept. of Anthropology – *History*
 - <https://anthropology.sdsu.edu/about-us/past-faculty>
- Signal Akron- *University of Akron*
 - <https://signalakron.org/dozens-of-faculty-positions-could-be-cut-at-university-of-akron-merger-of-some-science-programs-also-possible>
- U.S. Department of Justice- *Pro Bono Service Providers*
 - <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/list-pro-bono-legal-service-providers>
- Wenner Gren Foundation- *Fellowships*
 - <https://wennergren.org/grants-fellowships/>
- WGLT News – *AAUP report on Illinois Wesleyan U. program cuts*
 - <https://www.wglit.org/local-news/2021-05-28/iwu-administration-rejects-aaup-report-on-program-changes>

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