Anthropologists often find themselves in a position to explain their relevance to the larger public, especially in a politically charged neoliberal environment where working for big companies still comes with some trepidation for anthropology students critically engaging with issues of social justice. Research collaborations with corporate partners not only offer a meaningful immersive “real life” experience, but also a community engagement opportunity, both of which provide productive training. Yet, collaborations also create dilemmas for teachers in explaining the value and application of anthropology training along with principles and strategies for reconciling possible conflicting goals and findings with a corporate agenda.

In this paper, we examine our collaboration with Chevrolet-GM in product development research to eliminate texting while driving and improve road safety. The project involved 10 Masters-level students who combined their research practicum with learning to collaborate as a team. We explore the opportunities and challenges of corporate collaboration in student training, examining the considerable benefits accruing to students, including employment for some, along with issues of research integrity and the dilemmas posed for faculty leading these projects. We discuss how to cultivate meaningful collaborations with corporate partners that make anthropology education relevant, resilient, and adaptive to the 21st century workforce.

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