

# DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

## ASSESSMENT REPORT

2007-2008

California State University, Stanislaus

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### MISSION:

The goal of the Anthropology program, appropriate to the discipline, is to teach students to understand and appreciate the origin, evolution, and present diversity of human biology and culture. This is achieved by using a holistic approach covering basic subject areas, namely, archaeology, cultural, physical/biological, and applied anthropology to fulfill the Department of Anthropology's Learning Objectives.

### PROGRAM GOALS:

- Provide awareness about the complexity and comparative nature of anthropological knowledge, which studies humans as both biological and cultural beings.
- Provide cross-cultural information, which has important implications for human organization, cultural understanding and living among diverse societies in an increasingly complex and interdependent global environment.
- Provide both core and general education courses to facilitate options for various programs, including the Anthropology major and minor, the Liberal Studies Concentration, single subject teaching credential, and post baccalaureate/interdisciplinary M.A. program.
- Provide education which gives students a broad and informed knowledge base as well as the conceptual and analytical skills necessary for graduate school, professional training, and careers in diverse fields including research, teaching, administration, development work and related areas requiring insights into the concept of culture.

### STUDENT LEARNING GOALS/ OBJECTIVES:

- Facilitate the mastery of key concepts within the field of anthropology, including an understanding of the complexities, diversity, and history of human evolution and culture, and the holistic relationship between culture, biology, and history that is central to the discipline of anthropology.
- Develop key general and specific skills including writing, research, analytical reasoning, critical thinking, public speaking, and computer skills, with an aim to keep majors competitive in a very demanding contemporary workplace.
- Develop a global awareness through competence in the study of geographic regions as well as societies and their interdependency with the intent of enabling majors to be competitive in a job market that is increasingly globalizing.
- Develop specific skills through training in the methods of anthropological subfields (qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques, including ethnographic/participant observation field methods, data analysis, statistical analysis, forensics, and archaeological methods).

- Expose majors to a variety of teaching and learning objectives and practices in the field of anthropology and its four subfields, namely physical anthropology, cultural anthropology, archaeology, and linguistic anthropology.
- Enable the application of anthropological theories and methods through real world applied work (in the form of internships, service learning, field experience, research projects, and study abroad experience) that is required of all majors.
- Provide majors with training appropriate to prepare them for graduate and/or professional school and teaching.
- Enable majors to obtain a sophisticated understanding of the theoretical orientations, holistic perspectives, and history of anthropology.

## WHAT DATA WERE COLLECTED AND HOW?

In accordance with the Assessment Plan approved by the Department of Anthropology, the following assessment measures were employed during the 2007-2008 academic year.

### DIRECT MEASURES:

- **Embedded Exams and Assignments:** Data routinely derived from course assignments and exams were used to ascertain progress on multiple learning objectives and program goals.
- **Fieldwork:** For Catalogue Years 2006 and later, students are required to complete a “Practical Requirement,” in which student performance in a field context under faculty supervision was evaluated. In 2007-2008, student field work skills were formally assessed in ANTH 4420 (Bodies of Evidence) and ANTH 4605 (Archaeological Field Methods). Additional assessment of student skills was also completed in courses with field-based assignments.
- **Capstone Course:** Anth 4500, required of all majors, evaluated each student’s comprehensive achievement on a variety of departmental learning objectives. In 2007-2008, the capstone class final project was used as a direct measure of student learning outcomes (see below)

### INDIRECT MEASURES:

- **Exit Survey:** An Anthropology Exit Survey was distributed to senior anthropology majors enrolled in the Capstone course. This course is required to complete the major and is therefore a good pool from which to draw thoughtful, engaged responses to an exit survey. Graduating majors who had taken the Capstone course in previous years received the survey during the Spring 2008 Anthropology Majors meeting

## WHICH LEARNING OBJECTIVE RECEIVED TARGETED ASSESSMENT IN 2007-2008?

- To build on successes achieved in 2006-2007, the Anthropology faculty decided to incorporate targeted assessment of specific learning objectives on an annual basis—a different learning objective will be targeted each year, with the complete cycle projected to coincide with periodic program reviews. It is the department’s goal to conduct targeted assessment of each learning objective once within each cycle. To facilitate this process, the department is in the process of reviewing and revising the current learning objectives to bring them in line with the 5 year review cycle. This process will be complete by the end of the 2008-2009 academic year. In order to avoid unnecessary delay in implementing this important direct measure of student learning,

the department faculty decided to begin this process as the review of student learning objectives continues by assessing a learning objective we believe to be essential to department goals (and therefore unlikely to change significantly as the learning objectives are revised in anticipation of subsequent targeted assessment).

- The following learning objective was selected by the Anthropology faculty for targeted assessment in 2007-2008:
  - “Enable majors to obtain a sophisticated understanding of the theoretical orientations, holistic perspectives, and history of anthropology.”
- This learning objective was assessed using a direct measure that forms part of ANTH 4500 (the Capstone course). Final research projects completed by all ANTH 4500 students were reviewed by three Anthropology faculty members using a three level rubric. This rubric assesses the degree to which graduating anthropology majors demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the theoretical orientation, holistic perspectives, and history of anthropology, as reflected in a research project in which these competencies are demonstrated. Given that these research projects require students to draw on coursework completed and experience obtained throughout the major, the anthropology faculty believe the projects to be good direct measures of student achievement within the major.

## **HOW WERE DATA EVALUATED AND RECOMMENDATIONS MADE?**

In 2007-2008 both direct and indirect measures were used in Anthropology Program Assessment, and data generated by each measure were evaluated independently. The results of each measure were discussed by the anthropology faculty through email exchanges, informal conversations, during department meetings (time for discussions related to program assessment is set aside on the agenda for each and every department meeting), and during Anthropology Program meetings. Recommendations for program improvement were made by the faculty and will be implemented during the 2008-2009 academic year.

It should also be noted that faculty within the Department of Anthropology view the Assessment Plan as part of an ongoing (and often lively) discussion of pedagogical, curricular, and discipline-specific issues. These conversations often spill out of the confines of department meetings and formal documents into hallways and offices, and, consequently, some of the most productive use of assessment data has occurred spontaneously and in very informal settings.

## **BACKGROUND**

- In 2005-06 (prior to the formation of the campus-wide Program Assessment Committee), the Department of Anthropology redesigned its major in response to its own assessment of its program goals, mission, and learning objectives. The major was designed specifically to require the development of practical experience within the field of anthropology as a condition of conferring the BA degree.
- Since the formation of the campus-wide Program Assessment Committee, the Department of Anthropology has rewritten its mission statement, program goals, and learning objectives with respect to the changes it instituted in the major in 2005-06. (The revised mission statement, program goals, and learning objectives are included above)
- In accordance with the Assessment Plan, the Department of Anthropology began tracking the success of these changes, as well as assessing other program goals and learning objectives, using both its traditional direct methods and its recently instituted indirect method: the Anthropology Exit Survey.

#### DATA EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION PROCESS: DIRECT MEASURE

- In accordance with the Program Assessment Plan formulated and approved by the Anthropology Department, the following program learning objective was evaluated using a direct measure in Spring, 2008:
  - “Enable majors to obtain a sophisticated understanding of the theoretical orientations, holistic perspectives, and history of anthropology.”
- The measure consisted of a three level rubric used to assess competency demonstrated in the completion of the Capstone Course (ANTH 4500) final project.
- Following completion of the Capstone Course final projects (essays in which each student researched, discussed, and evaluated the contributions of an important anthropological theorist), with the permission of the students, the ANTH 4500 instructor made copies of each essay available to the Program Assessment Coordinator (PAC). The PAC removed all information that could be used to identify the student from each copy (i.e. names, initials, email addresses, etc.) and assigned each essay a number at random. These numbers were used as identifiers in all subsequent documentation and discussion.
- In consultation with the faculty, the PAC formulated a 3 level rubric that was used to evaluate the extent to which mastery of the learning objective was attained as demonstrated in the essay.
- The rubric and numbered copies of student work were distributed to 3 members of the faculty, who independently read and scored each essay.
- The completed rubrics were returned to the PAC, who tabulated the scores, assessed inter-rater reliability, and prepared a spreadsheet in which the data were tabulated for analysis and departmental consideration.
- The spreadsheet and a summary report were distributed electronically to all members of the anthropology faculty, who were invited to share their thoughts, observations, and suggestions for improvement.
- The data have stimulated interesting and productive discussions carried out electronically and in person, and these discussions form the basis for the recommendations for improving student learning presented below.
- The results of the survey were briefly revisited during the September Department Meeting and discussed in more depth during the September 22 Anthropology Program Meeting.

#### DATA EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION PROCESS: INDIRECT MEASURE

- In Spring, 2008, minor revisions to the Anthropology Exit Survey written and approved by the Department of Anthropology in 2007 were made and approved by the faculty. The revised Anthropology Exit Survey was administered to senior anthropology majors enrolled in the Capstone (ANTH 4500) course and to advanced anthropology majors who attended the Anthropology Majors Meeting.
- The data were compiled by the Program Assessment Coordinator using the spreadsheet template designed during the 2007 evaluation process. Results of the survey were distributed electronically to members of the Anthropology Department and discussed informally (in both face-to-face meetings and through intra-office emails) immediately following their distribution. The results of both the survey and the direct assessment of the Capstone course projects were discussed at length during the September 22 Anthropology Program. During this meeting, recommendations for improving student learning and improving the program were formalized by those present.

## WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING WERE MADE?

- As was the case in 2007, one of the strongest themes that emerged from the indirect measure was a student desire for more hands-on, practical experience opportunities within the anthropology curriculum. Survey respondents believed that, given the nature of anthropological research, active learning approaches (including hand-on activities and fieldwork) provided them with a deeper understanding of course material and the practical skills necessary to pursue graduate studies (70% of the 2008 survey respondents plan to pursue an advanced degree in anthropology) or work in related fields. The faculty strongly concur with this student assessment, and have taken the following steps to increase practical experience opportunities within the curriculum:
  - Continued to evaluate positively the addition of the practical experience requirement during the 2005-2006 re-design of the Anthropology Major
  - Worked to schedule courses with an active hands-on or fieldwork component, including ANTH 4420 (Bodies of Evidence), ANTH 4605 (Archaeological Field Methods), and ANTH 4040 (The Fieldwork Process) more frequently.
  - Prioritized the development of new hands-on oriented classes, including ANTH 4850 (Crafting Maya Identities: Household Archaeology in Mesoamerica, part of the GE Summit Cluster program) and ANTH 4640 (archaeological field school in western Honduras).
  - Increased service learning components in courses currently offered, including ANTH 4040 (The Fieldwork Process), in which students will investigate attitudes toward sustainability in conjunction with the 2008 Bioneers Conference
  - Worked to incorporate graduate and undergraduate students into faculty research programs, including securing funding for such student research. In 2008, 2 students accompanied a faculty member to western Honduras to conduct archaeological research.
  - Worked to include more hands-on activities in individual classes as appropriate.
- In 2008, students also indicated that there is a very high demand for a Masters program in Anthropology. Students made this request in nearly 90% of the discursive comments.
  - The Anthropology faculty applaud the interest and will investigate the possibility of establishing such a program.
- The direct assessment of student work opened a number of avenues of productive discussion, and indicated that the Capstone Class (ANTH 4500) as a whole met the Student Learning Objective to a satisfactory degree. There is, however, room for improvement, both of student performance and the assessment of that performance, and the department will continue to revise the assessment procedure based on lessons learned from the 2008 direct assessment.
  - Through the direct assessment measure, it was noted that students appear to have been less successful in demonstrating a masterful understanding of holistic perspectives within anthropology and faculty decided to probe this possible weakness by initiating discussions of holism in courses throughout the curriculum in 2008-2009.