

Assessment Plan

Department/Program: Anthropology

Learning Goals

Our overarching goal is to provide students with sophisticated ways of understanding both human unity and human difference. We want students to think critically about discourses that divide the world into fully modern western Selves and not-yet-modern non-western Others, but to do so without romanticizing cultural differences. We want them to appreciate how anthropological theory is constructed and used in understanding particular cases. Our approach is premised on complex global interconnectivity that interrogates boundary-making projects and explores the fabrication of national, cultural and regional differences in a historical perspective. This means zooming in to understand how translocal ideologies and forces are negotiated in local settings, but also zooming out to link up localities and build a contingent picture of the interconnected world we inhabit.

Method of Evaluation

Modes of evaluation are structured into the design of our curriculum. We expect majors to: acquire competence in anthropological theory; define and complete coherent concentrations within the major; and carry out a capstone project. Course instructors, academic advisors, and senior project advisors monitor students' progress in these endeavors, which we periodically discuss as a group in departmental meetings.

1. All majors are required to take two courses in anthropological theory. Cultural-track majors must take Theory 1 (ANTH295) and Theory 2 (ANTH 296), both of which examine anthropological approaches to particular topics in a historical perspective. Archaeology-track majors take either Theory 1 or Theory 2 and an advisor-approved course in archaeological theory. Students' performances in these courses, which are discussed at departmental meetings, help us to keep track of their intellectual growth and their mastery of the critical, analytical, writing, and verbal skills that are important in the discipline. A minimum grade of B+ in either Theory 1 or 2 is required for admission to honors candidacy, which gives a cumulative dimension to the theory requirement.
2. We require our majors to take four electives that constitute a concentration, chosen from one of ten sets we have defined. New majors discuss their potential concentrations with their advisors, who help them to select appropriate courses and track their progress; we expect majors to have begun (though not necessarily completed) their concentrations by the end of the junior year, and these should inform their capstone projects.
3. A protracted research project is required of all senior majors as a capstone experience. These projects challenge students to learn through practice how anthropological understanding is produced, a task that may involve use of visual technologies or performance techniques as well as writing. Capstone projects may take the form of an extended seminar paper, a senior essay, or an honors thesis. The first is the least

demanding and the most infrequently pursued. The departmental culture seems to encourage our majors to undertake the more ambitious capstone, and we view high numbers of theses and essays in a given year as an index of student involvement. Students who want to write theses must submit research proposals at the end of the junior year. The departmental faculty review these proposals at an end-of-semester meeting, and one faculty member is appointed to write a critique of each proposal; in some cases, the student is required to revise and resubmit on the basis of the critique; in still other cases, the student is advised to pursue the project as an essay rather than a thesis

In the fall all senior thesis writers pursue their individual projects in the collective context of ANTH400, Cultural Analysis. Essay writers may either take 400 or an individual tutorial. Thesis writers also begin to work informally with individual advisors, who will supervise their theses in the spring semester. Essays are evaluated by the 400 instructor or the individual tutor. The tutor, another department member, and someone from outside the department read theses and provide written commentaries as well as honors recommendations; discrepancies in the recommendations are mediated by the chair. Seniors give presentations on their theses at a departmental event which is at once a part of their capstone experience and a way of familiarizing juniors and new majors with the possibilities for anthropological research.

Post-Graduate

We follow up with graduates of our department, generally in their fifth year, to ask them the following: How have you used your anthropological education in your life since graduation?

How the Program/Department Uses Assessment Information

As we have noted, we use assessment information directly, by making a grade of B+ or higher in Theory 1 or Theory 2 a condition of honors candidacy; indirectly, we are more likely to encourage juniors who stand out in the core courses to begin developing thesis projects. We use the faculty's close evaluation of thesis proposals to determine feasibility of projects, match students with a faculty member who will advise them throughout their senior year, and anticipate the kind of guidance and feedback students will need during the research and writing process. Discussions between advisors and students regarding their concentration and their performance in concentration courses help faculty advise students on their capstone projects.

Assessment information also contributes to curricular decisions. For instance, for 2009-10 we revamped both our introductory and our core theory requirements on the basis of student performances and opinions. We replaced our two-field introductory course with separate courses on cultural anthropology and archaeology as it became clear that students primarily interested in one were not engaging effectively with the other. When we concluded that the survey format of our older core courses, Contemporary Anthropological Theory and History of Anthropological Thought, was actually reducing students' interest in the disciplinary past, we shifted to the topically focused format of

Theory 1 and Theory 2, which show how contemporary perspectives on particular issues are shaped both by and against historical approaches.

We will use the data we collect from recent graduates to assess the relevancy of our curriculum to their post-Wesleyan lives.