

## **ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT PROGRAM REVIEW WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY**

Anthropology Program Director: Dr. Linda Eaton

Program Review Committee: Dr. Pamela Miller, Chair; Associate Professor, Anthropology & Museum Studies, Utah State University Eastern; Dr. David C. Knowlton, Professor, Anthropology, Utah Valley University; Dr. Dan Bedford, Associate Professor, Geography Department, Weber State University; Dr. Michael Wutz, Presidential Distinguished Professor, Department of English, Weber State University.

On-site Visit: February 2, 2012.

**Purpose of Program Review:** The purpose of Program Review at WSU is to improve academic programs through the identification of program strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations for change. The Program Review Committee was charged with the following responsibilities:

1. Review of the content of the program to ensure that it is consistent with high standards and practices within the discipline.
2. Review resources (faculty, facilities and selected budgets, such as travel budgets) to ensure that they are consistent with supporting a quality program.
3. Identify strengths and weaknesses of the program.
4. Note any concerns or recommendations about the rates of recruitment of new students, placement of graduates and sensitivity to community and professional needs.
5. Review sufficiency of the evidence of student learning.

This report is organized to reflect the committee charge and each topic will be considered. Many comments overlap topics.

### **1. Overview and Summary**

The committee's main impressions of the program can be summarized in three basic points:

- The program is of exceptionally high quality, likely one of the most rigorous, vibrant and engaging majors on campus.
- This is all the more remarkable for the chronic under-staffing evident. That such a strong program has been built and maintained is a true testament to the quality of the faculty, both full time and adjunct.
- Thus, our principal concern about the program is whether its current high standards and high enrollments can be maintained at current staffing levels, especially considering the impact of faculty leaves, retirements, etc.

These are the three fundamental impressions the team derived from our site visit and review of available documents. We also found weaknesses in the program, but these are small in comparison to the strengths. We highlight them here with the intention of providing a useful review that indicates potential areas for improvement. Comments on weaknesses in the program are expressly **not** intended to detract from our three basic conclusions outlined above.

### **2. Review of the content of the program to ensure that it is consistent with high standards and practices within the discipline.**

The committee found very strong, academically demanding course offerings, many of which incorporate high-impact learning practices such as undergraduate research, fieldwork, and study abroad. There is an impressive synergy between scholarship and teaching, most notably in Archaeology. The program offers an impressive array of courses, considering the very small number of faculty. Current students and alumni alike spoke highly of the courses. Alumni in Archaeology specifically noted that their strong preparation gave them an advantage when beginning graduate work. We also note an impressive commitment to internal review of program and course learning outcomes.

However, the committee had two areas of concern. First, our review of the catalog listings for the Anthropology Program, and our post-visit communications with the faculty, leave us with the strong impression that, while the faculty are clearly committed to the four-field approach, this commitment does not carry through the curriculum in a systematic way beyond the introductory level, especially for cultural anthropology. The existence of numerous special topics classes which *can* serve this purpose does not ensure that they *will* do so, especially given the small number of full time faculty and the program's consequent vulnerability to faculty leaves, retirements, illness, etc. The exception to this is the Archaeology program which maintains consistent offerings from lower division through upper division level coursework.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the evidence available to the committee (syllabi and student interviews) suggests to us that coursework readings, especially in cultural anthropology, emphasize classical work; exposure to the most recent, cutting edge scholarship is limited. This is emphatically not a judgment on course or faculty quality, but is instead an observation based on the real difficulties of staying current in one's discipline many years after graduate school while working at an institution that requires a heavy teaching load. (This observation is as true for the committee members as for anyone else.) The lack of recent hires in the program is likely a major cause.

### **3. Review resources (faculty, facilities and selected budgets, such as travel budgets) to ensure that they are consistent with supporting a quality program.**

**Faculty:** The greatest resource of the Anthropology Department is its faculty including adjunct faculty. The program has outstanding, dedicated, and award-winning full-time faculty. Our chief concern is the small number of full-time faculty, which increases the program's vulnerability in the event that faculty are unavailable to teach a full course load (e.g. due to illness, leave, administrative duties, retirement). The extended leave of Dr. Ron Holt provides a case in point, and the program was lucky to have been able to hire a very strong adjunct professor (Dr. Susan Young) in his stead. Adjunct faculty are an asset to the program, and are well incorporated into program activities, but the lack of full time faculty means the program is increasingly dependent on adjuncts. This is problematic in terms of maintaining program stability; although several of the adjuncts we interviewed have other ties to the university, this is another stroke of good luck and not necessarily to be relied upon. The program has improvised extremely well to handle staffing shortages, but we are concerned about what happens when the luck runs out. An expansion of the full time faculty seems to us to be an urgent requirement.

**Facilities:** The facilities are excellent, particularly the Archaeology Lab, storage space, and equipment storage. Several built-in display cases showcase anthropology projects and serve as physical ambassadors of the program.

**Budget:** It was reported that faculty are allotted \$700.00 per year for travel. This is not adequate to attend a single professional meeting. There is a per faculty base budget of \$2,100 annually for the department; this reportedly has not changed in more than 20 years, even when the program became a major ten years ago.

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There is limited funding for student research and lack of remuneration for study abroad faculty. The budget has not allowed the department to obtain an additional tenure track line, despite the evident, comparative need of the program and the ten years that have passed since the major was instituted.

Another area of interest in the budget arena is the apparent separation of funding into day school and night school. Adjuncts confined to teaching only night classes creates an enormous inflexibility when student demand is greatest in the morning. That is when the full range of classes is needed.

In addition, the 4-4 teaching load means that faculty self-sacrifice and work extra hours to do anything beyond teaching lower division classes, although they do so but the system is probably unsustainable particularly as retirements approach. Although this is the norm across WSU, it is heavy compared with many other institutions, and makes the WSU Anthropology Program's accomplishments all the more impressive.

#### **4. Identify strengths and weaknesses of the program.**

**Strengths:** The department self-study demonstrates a systematic effort to integrate their mission statement with the program, efforts to assess, and solid planning. We noted the solid commitment of faculty to the four field program and strong emphasis on theory and research.

The committee was most impressed by the esprit de corps existing among faculty, staff, adjunct faculty, the student body, the alumni, and even community members. The Anthropology ~~Club~~ has been in existence for 42 years and has a tradition of offering regular brown bag luncheons and workshops to engage students and faculty alike, and raise the program's profile among the student body. The group of adjunct faculty--far from feeling an isolated appendix or addendum--jointly expressed their unanimous and enthusiastic feeling of integration into the Program, and that their range of expertise (notwithstanding any corresponding compensation) was given full professional recognition by the department chair and their tenured colleagues.

The Archaeology Program's high level of academic rigor, emphasis on fieldwork, student participation at conferences, strong working relationships with other agencies such as the USDA Forest Service, and high public profile constitute a major program strength.

Commitment to high impact learning is demonstrated by the willingness of the faculty to plan and participate in study abroad programs and fieldwork. It is impressive because of the evident intellectual depth of the programs. These are demanding strategies to undertake, but they have a high payoff.

The committee was similarly impressed by the partnerships and agreements the Archaeology Program has been able to build and sustain with community businesses and the USDA Forest Service. Such forms of cooperation provide not only for internships (both paid and unpaid) and hands-on/applied experience for students, but also increase placement opportunities in strong graduate schools and the employment sector following graduation. Indeed, several graduates from the program, in both Archaeology and Anthropology, testified to how well prepared they were for professional careers, and how much field-experience they had upon entry into a graduate program.

**Weaknesses:** The program is understaffed, hence overworked and unsustainable in the long run. When senior faculty retire, it will be very difficult to find younger faculty willing to commit to the workloads that senior faculty have come to accept as routine. Changing the makeup of the current faculty—which is inevitable given retirement (2 in the near future)—will introduce unavoidable inefficiencies into the program which it cannot afford at current staffing levels. If the program is to continue as successfully as it has so far, expanding the number of full-time faculty is essential. Many of the following weaknesses are a consequence of this single major difficulty.

Dependence on adjuncts is a consequence of the understaffing noted above. Although the program has done an exceptional job of incorporating adjunct faculty, and the adjunct faculty are generally of very high quality, the availability of adjuncts is less predictable than for full-time faculty.

Lack of remuneration for study abroad faculty leaves this important part of the program vulnerable to the willingness of faculty or adjuncts to take on additional work. Because study abroad is a critical part of an undergraduate education in Anthropology the institution needs to financially strengthen and solidify support for this program.

Although the Archaeology Program has a strong public face in the community, the evidence available to the committee did not indicate a similar commitment to community-based learning in the Anthropology track. Anthropology is not part of the Utah State Core Curriculum resulting in college or university level courses becoming the first awareness of the discipline. The public generally does not support what it does not understand. See recommendations below.

**5. Note any concerns or recommendations about the rates of recruitment of new students, placement of graduates and sensitivity to community and professional needs.**

Because WSU's four field approach diverges slightly from the lower division curricula in other state schools we suggest a written policy guiding articulation of courses between WSU and other state institutions. This will assure incoming transfer students will receive appropriate credit for their pre-WSU experiences, particularly as administrative roles change within the department.

Although the department's mission statement claims, in part, that "The program prepares students for a broad range of both public and private sector employment in anthropology-related fields or to enter professional or graduate schools appropriate to their interests" there is no data to indicate what those fields of employment are and how many students are employed after graduation. All recent graduates have expressed an intention to go to graduate school but only very limited data exist on how many follow through, where they go, and what level of success they achieve. The Archaeology program has managed to do this, and Anthropology majors should be tracked as well. Establishing a mechanism to track such information (beyond maintaining graduates on an email list) would enable the program to reflect on its own success in terms of job and/or graduate school placement rates, and would furthermore establish an Alumni network that would no doubt prove fruitful for future placement and fund-raising. Such tracking and network could be developed and maintained, in part, through traditional university channels (such as a listserv), but also be furthered through social media sites (such as Facebook) and thus be closer in spirit to the emerging generation of (digital) anthropologists.

We suggest that Anthropology, building on the success of Archaeology, nourish community contacts to increase its visibility within Ogden and the region, and that it should consider engaging the services of the Community Involvement Center as it spearheads collaborative service-learning opportunities for its students. Such collaboration would not only be in the spirit of the discipline, but also enhance the Program's public face and standing within the community.

Another opportunity would be to take curricular advantage of Dr. Conover's expertise in forensics and her connection with local police.

**6. Review sufficiency of the evidence of student learning.**

The program demonstrates an admirable commitment to tracking student learning of both program goals and specific learning outcomes for individual courses. This is impressive, and likely ahead of many other programs at WSU, at least within the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

However, the assessment process is, inevitably, a work in progress, and we found some areas of concern. First, the assessment survey is problematic as a tool of assessment since it tautologically biases in favor of certain answers within what it wishes to test. Learning outcomes should be fine-tuned or new ones developed in view of the next re-accreditation site visit.

Second, based on exit interview data, students demonstrate a lower self-assessed knowledge of research methods at the end of the program than they do for any other area examined in the exit interview. When this concern was raised directly during the site visit, the committee did not receive a terribly satisfactory answer, although new information provided after the fact suggests this may be less of an issue than we previously thought.

Despite the weaknesses outlined above, most of which are based on lack of resources given by the administration of Weber State University, our profound respect goes out to both faculty and adjunct faculty for sustaining what surely must be among the most engaging, vibrant and intellectually challenging majors on the WSU campus. We are deeply impressed.