

# **Unit Review: Anthropology Program**

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Weber State University

## **Review Committee Members:**

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## **General Evaluation:**

The Anthropology Program in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Weber State University has a clear vision for their program and student success. Based on our assessment of the documents provided and our site visit, we were impressed with the academic rigor and breadth of the program and its faculty, especially considering its small size. While our assessment is largely positive, we noted a few areas with potential for improvement, most of which were already recognized by the department chair and program faculty. This review provides an assessment of the Anthropology Program following the guidelines of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. We also outline five general recommendations for improvement at the program level.

Unlike comparable programs in the region, the Anthropology program at WSU is focused on a well-rounded education for students in anthropology. In particular, they have employed faculty members from three of the four subdisciplines of anthropology: archaeology (2); sociocultural anthropology (2); biological anthropology (1). Only a linguistic anthropologist is missing. This is an impressive breadth, not found even in larger departments/programs in other institutions in Utah or the Intermountain West.

It should be noted that during the pandemic, significant adjustments were made by the department to accommodate online learning, and the disruptions caused by this global event had an impact on the accomplishment of goals derived from the previous program review. For example, the assessment of upper division courses was delayed. Regardless, notable progress has been made, and the Anthropology Program now covers a third subdiscipline of Anthropology (as already described) with the addition of a faculty line focused on biological anthropology.

The move to the newly renovated Lindquist Hall also has provided necessary upgrades to facilities that support the two anthropological subdisciplines that are focused on material sciences: archaeology and biological anthropology. The two laboratories are, and will continue to be, wonderful assets to the instruction of students engaged in these topics.

## **Mission Statement:**

The mission statement established for the Anthropology Program is centered on the holistic study of humanity with a focus on the learning and appreciation of political, religious, and

biological diversity among societies today and in the past. It also works to broaden students' perspectives and encourages viewpoints free of ethnocentric biases. Finally, the mission statement recognizes the ultimate goals of training students for gainful employment in the private and public sectors or further graduate education.

After reviewing the program's self-study and speaking with faculty and students, it is evident that the department has worked to align their activities with the goals outlined in their mission statement. This not only applies to courses offered to students who are declared majors, but also students in the general population who enroll in anthropology courses that fulfill general-education requirements. Currently, the department offers five courses that fit four different general-education requirements: social science, life science, humanities, and diversity. This is commendable as it shows the department's willingness to extend their mission goals to students outside of their major. It was mentioned that the number of attributes these general-education courses fulfill is more than what many other programs on campus offer. This diversity substantially increases the assessment burden for the program, making it an even more noteworthy contribution to the WSU general-education curriculum.

Finally, the mission statement aims to help students take the next step following their undergraduate educations. This includes either a career in an anthropology-related field or graduate studies. The addition of a capstone course (ANTH 4900) along with the current (ongoing) reevaluation of upper division courses and their inclusion of "content regarding career application of disciplinary knowledge" will help achieve this goal.

### **Curriculum:**

The Anthropology Program offers four types of degrees and one certificate. While this was stated in the self-study, we were informed during the site visit that the Archaeological Technician Associate of Applied Science and Archaeological Technician Institutional Certificate are no longer offered to students (although the website and other online outlets suggest that these are still active programs of study, see Recommendations).

The major credit requirements for the remaining degrees (39-42 for majors; 18 for minors or BIS) are commensurate and comparable to other programs in the region in terms of the number of credit hours required to graduate. In review of the courses offered that contribute to the fulfillment of the degree requirements of this program, it is clear that the curriculum has been designed to fulfill the mission and aims of the Anthropology Program. In particular, courses such as Biological Anthropology (ANTH 1020), Language and Culture (ANTH 1040), Prehistory of North America (ANTH 3100), and Sex Roles: Past, Present and Future (ANTH 3700) actively work to provide students with a holistic and comparative approach to the study of humankind. In addition, courses such as Archaeological Method, Theory, and Cultural Resource Management (ANTH 4100), Archaeological Laboratory Techniques (ANTH 3400), Anthropological Research Methods (ANTH 4300), Internship in Anthropology (ANTH 4890), and Senior Capstone Seminar (ANTH 4900) work to fulfill the goal of preparing students for their careers or further graduate training.

We applaud the addition of a new capstone course (ANTH 4900) for the various tracks offered in the department. We understand that it is new course, and over the first few semesters, any new

course will require some adjustments, including an alignment with program goals and mission, the addition/subtraction of various requirements, etc. During interviews with faculty, it was evident that a set curriculum had not yet been established. At the same time, faculty agreed that there needed to be a discussion in order to work towards an established curriculum for this course. This would be important considering the fact that the capstone course is planned to be taught by various faculty in rotation in the future.

We also note that high impact educational experiences (HIEE) are integrated within several courses in the major. In addition, the program has applied for course-based research (CRE) and internship (INT) attributes for some of these courses. Further, use of the new global learning (GLB) course attribute is planned. Not only do these efforts indicate the use of contemporary best practices within higher education, as well as an exceptional level of dedication to effective instruction, they are also well aligned with (and in support of) ongoing initiatives of the WSU Academic Affairs Division.

### **Learning Outcomes and Assessment:**

As provided within the self-study, the courses that also fulfill general-education requirements have very clear learning outcomes with various methods of measurement. The study also outlines the Proposed Course-specific Assessment Cycle (2020-2027), whose purpose is to assess the eight Anthropology Program Learning Outcomes. As mentioned above, this assessment was delayed due to the effects of the pandemic. We do not see it necessary to include our own recommendations regarding the improvement of the assessments, as the program has already outlined the following: 1) more clearly define and describe their program learning outcomes, 2) find ways to effectively operationalize particular learning outcomes, and 3) revise direct and indirect assessment measures for program learning outcomes (see p.12 of program self-study under heading PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN). Notably, the assessment plan also indicates that a program-level e-portfolio assessment will be developed. We applaud this approach and believe it aligns well with the goals of the WSU Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

### **Advising:**

Once again, it is clear that those over the Anthropology Program have identified particular needs in regard to preparing students for their future careers. In particular, the Senior Capstone Seminar (ANTH 4900) works to fulfill this goal of the program mission and can be considered a new way to prepare students through advisement in the classroom. Faculty indicated in the self-study that there is a need to effectively use Starfish to monitor and track student progress, and there are plans to help students properly sequence particular required courses through close monitoring, although the specific mechanisms for these improvements were not clearly stated. Once again, we applaud these efforts and simply suggest that the faculty work towards these goals.

### **Faculty/Staff:**

As was mentioned in the previous review and in our interviews, we note the heavy teaching load of faculty in the Anthropology Program. While we recognize WSU as a teaching institution, the time committed to teaching approximately eight courses per year requires a sacrifice on the part of the faculty in regard to their research programs. Despite these circumstances, we were impressed by the breadth, quality, and quantity of research the faculty have been able to accomplish, as assessed in the form of publications and other scholarly works.

One concern in relation to the teaching load was expressed by those who teach the field school, whose 6 credit hours are far fewer than what these professors actually commit to each week they spend in the field. It is our opinion that the time commitment during field school should be accounted for either by incorporating the true commitment within the normal teaching load or by supplemental pay (as determined by the administration and faculty involved). One possibility is to offset the field-school commitment by teaching releases (at least 3-6 credits) during the fall and spring semesters. Another possibility may be to use student instructors or teaching assistants to fulfill some roles (where appropriate).

We also realize both the need and difficulties related to operating a program that relies so heavily on adjunct faculty. While the adjunct faculty teaching for the department are obviously qualified and contribute significantly to the program mission and goals, the department should continue to be aware (as expressed in faculty interviews) of the pitfalls of relying so heavily on adjunct faculty. We see progress towards this end with the hiring of a new faculty member (Joanna Gautney) whose emphasis in biological anthropology fills some of the curricular gaps. Additionally, we were pleased to learn that the department has been approved to begin a search for a cultural anthropologist to fill the void left when Dr. Holt retires. This is important considering the number of students enrolled in the General Anthropology program. It also should be noted that as is happening at other universities, if adjunct faculty wages are not competitive (and adjusted accordingly) there is the potential of these employees leaving WSU for more beneficial positions. If this were to occur for Anthropology, it would dramatically diminish the potential for the program to offer a comprehensive and diverse curriculum.

We suggest a long-term goal at the program, department, college, and university level should be to continue to develop the program in a manner that can eventually justify an additional tenure-track position. In our interviews, both the chair and the dean acknowledged that the program would benefit from the presence of a linguistic anthropologist, suggesting there is ample justification for this goal. In addition, another tenure-track faculty member would help reduce the present dependence on adjunct faculty.

As the self-study indicated, there is only one full-time staff member, Belinda McElheny, who has worked in this position for over 8 years. It should be noted that she is valued highly by the faculty who recognize her role in their success and that of the students. Her excellent performance is manifest in the Presidential Outstanding Staff Award she received in 2018. We believe that additional and continued recognition of her work is merited, not only in potential financial compensation, but also in the form of additional support staff.

### **External Communities:**

During our site visit, we also had the pleasure of meeting with people belonging to three entities that serve as possible future employers for WSU students in the Anthropology Program: Chris Merritt from Utah State History, Sandy Pagano from Sagebrush Consultants, and Jody Patterson from Montgomery Archaeological Consultants. Some of these professionals have taught courses for the Anthropology Program, and they have also provided internship opportunities for students. We see these relationships with professionals as one of the major strengths of this program, and we encourage these wonderful and productive interactions between professionals and students to

continue. The three people/entities we visited with were specific to helping students in the archaeology track, and faculty mentioned that other internship opportunities with external entities need to be developed, specifically for students interested in biological, cultural, and linguistic anthropology. We encourage further work towards this goal.

### **Implementation of Recommendations from Previous Review:**

In light of the previous unit review in 2017, members of the Anthropology Program have successfully accomplished many of the goals set following the recommendations of the reviewers. It should be recognized that some of the recommendations put forth in 2017 were not necessarily within the capacity of the faculty and staff to accomplish. For example, while faculty agreed that improving adjunct compensation was desired, it is clear that increases in adjunct compensation is largely dependent upon university administration, state legislature, and other entities.

For those recommendations that were within control of the program faculty, we applaud their accomplishments. We consider the following admirable and tangible successes resulting from the previous review:

- The addition of a biological anthropologist faculty member (Joanna Gautney) and four new biological anthropology courses.
- The successful assessment of general-education courses and the establishment of an extended assessment plan (i.e., Proposed Course-specific Assessment Cycle 2020-2027).
- A mission statement whose goals are adequately aligned and accomplished successfully through curriculum and program outcomes.

### **Program-level Recommendations:**

1. Once again, we were impressed to see the addition of the Senior Capstone Seminar (ANTH 4900), although as stated above, the faculty admit to a lack of an agreed-upon curriculum for this course that represents all faculty who teach or will teach it. We suggest that the faculty collaborate to determine several learning outcomes specific to this course. We also suggest that some type of program-level assessment be implemented (e.g., exit survey, graduation sign off, etc.) as part of this course, in order to assure that the program's learning outcomes are met by the time students complete this course (which should be completed at or near the time of graduation). This would provide an efficient means to gather program-level feedback from virtually all graduates.
2. The department has been working toward balancing faculty emphases in the various subdisciplines within the field of anthropology. The addition of a biological anthropologist partly fulfilled this goal. It will be important to continue to monitor the distribution of students in the different subdisciplines and hire future faculty with student enrollments in mind. For example, presently there is a large number of general anthropology students, thus the plan and approval to hire a cultural anthropologist in 2022 aligns well with a goal to balance the faculty emphases with student demand.
3. The present situation in which faculty coordinate and teach the field school by dedicating substantial un-compensated time to the effort seems counter-productive for long term sustainability of the program curriculum and for providing time for faculty scholarship,

etc. Although we recognize this may be a difficult area to address given limited resources and potential options as well as the fact that the faculty are committed to maintaining a field school *and* a diverse program curriculum, we suggest it will be important for the program to recognize this dilemma and begin to work toward a more equitable and sustainable solution so that faculty loads across the program are as equivalent as possible and consistent with reasonable expectations for tenure-track faculty.

4. Faculty and staff indicated that there are several courses that are no longer taught due to the retirement of former instructors or other factors. In order to reduce confusion among students who may see these courses in the catalog and desire to enroll, we suggest these courses should be removed if, in fact, they will not be offered in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the present biological electives are all temporary, special-topic courses. If these are to be taught regularly, from now on, we suggest that these should be added to the catalog course offerings in place of those that are no longer taught. Additionally, we were informed that two unit programs have been discontinued and students are no longer able to graduate with an emphasis in *Archaeological Technician Associate of Applied Science* or with an *Archaeological Technician Institutional Certificate*. In consultation with faculty, it was agreed that these should also be removed from any department informational outlets (e.g., department website, course catalog, advisement materials, etc.).
5. Faculty in the Department of Anthropology are involved in very engaging research, much of which includes student involvement. Public outreach, on both the campus and community levels, can highlight these wonderful accomplishments. It can also bring attention to the strengths of the program and its goals. Various forms of outreach can also be a useful tool to increase future enrollments in general education courses and encourage more students to declare anthropology as their major. We suggest that the department work towards developing various avenues of outreach that will allow them to increase their public persona.