

DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT PLAN

Department of Anthropology
Spring 2014

A. Department Student Learning Statement

The goal of assessing our undergraduate anthropology program is to improve the quality of instruction available to our students. We should know what students learn and how well they are able to apply what they learn. We should determine whether what students have learned corresponds with department program objectives and goals.

Goals for student learning include specific knowledge students should acquire, skills they should possess, attitudes they should develop, and requirements for careers for which they are preparing. Classroom instruction, course syllabi, final examinations, student papers, and other student work are mechanisms by which goals are achieved.

The aim of the anthropology program is to train students to think anthropologically, that is, to think holistically and critically about the human condition and the values, assumptions and premises they may encounter in a culturally complex and socially diverse world that is being knit ever more closely together by the processes of globalization. We seek to educate our students broadly in the wide-ranging field of anthropology, to give them the theoretical training they need to understand why we frame questions the way we do, and to train them in the methods of anthropological inquiry. More narrowly, we prepare students for graduate work in the discipline and in related fields, and provide them with practical ethnographic skills that will be of value to them professionally in a broad range of careers. To that end the department requires study abroad and emphasizes courses in theory and in methods.

The department curriculum supports the general education requirements of the College, including courses that fulfill the Internationalism, Writing, Quantitative Thinking, and Multiculturalism requirements, as well as the Social Sciences and Natural Sciences requirements.

B. Learning goals and outcomes expected of students who major in Anthropology

General Goals

The general goals of the department of anthropology are complementary with many of the broad goals of higher education. Specifically, the department strives to prepare students:

1. to speak and write with precision, clarity, and organization; to acquire basic scientific and technological literacy appropriate to the discipline; and to be able to apply knowledge.
2. for immediate employment, graduate or professional school, and meaningful, productive lives.
3. of all backgrounds to appreciate science and engage in life-long learning.

Knowledge Goals for Anthropology Majors

1. Familiarity with the breadth of the discipline and its interconnecting principles.
2. Knowledge of the research methods used by anthropologists, including the appropriate use of information technology, and be able to apply them.
3. Knowledge of the concept of culture and how cultural processes work in the production of meaning.
4. The ability to analyze the levels of sociocultural integration, know how these are distributed throughout the world, and be able to explain how these arose historically.
5. Be well read in social and cultural theory and be able to use it to explain social and cultural phenomena.
6. Be aware of the ethical implications of research.

Learning outcomes and general skills for Anthropology Majors

These skills are expected of all students majoring in anthropology.

1. The ability to understand and analyze how human beings are shaped by, and interact with, their social, cultural and physical environments, and an appreciation of human social, cultural and biological diversity.
2. The ability to communicate in several media, including orally, in writing, and visually as evidenced by performance in classroom and other public settings.

3. The ability to design and implement an independent research project in anthropology as evidenced by graded research projects directed by the anthropology faculty and other collaborating faculty.
4. An ability to conduct literature searches on selected topics as evidenced by discerning patterns, and understanding the linkages among data, method, and theory.
5. The capacity to provide an ethnographic description of a social situation and analyze it.
6. The ability to engage, where appropriate, in constructive discussion in group situations and group-work skills.
7. Communication and resourcefulness. Students should be able to read, write, listen and speak anthropologically. They should be able to read professional and technical publications, contribute to group efforts, and make written expositions and oral presentations.

C. Determination of the extent to which students have achieved these goals.

Anthropology majors will be assessed through course-embedded measurement of knowledge and skill objectives appropriate to each student's program, and through performance in a capstone course. The key to this system of assessment is the evaluation that takes place within the Senior Seminar.

The five required courses in the major provide a structured context in which a student's progress towards meeting the department's goals for his or her education can be measured. Cultural/General Anthropology gives them a grounding in the basic concepts of the discipline, and how the various sub-fields relate to each other; a course in biological anthropology ensures that students in a predominantly cultural anthropology department have a working knowledge of a major sub-field in the discipline; the methods course trains students in field methods and data analysis; the theory course trains students to critically assess and apply different models of explanation to their data; and the senior seminar requires them to integrate this training into a major independent research project. This program is supplemented and expanded by specific elective courses on various topics.

On-going Assessment

Each course in the anthropology program will provide students with the opportunity to develop and exercise knowledge and skills appropriate to the subject matter of the course.

During their final semester, each anthropology major will participate in a consultation with a member of the anthropology faculty (their regular academic advisor or the faculty

member teaching the Senior Seminar.) During the consultation, the student's transcript will be reviewed, the student's plans for the future will be discussed, and the student will be given an opportunity to reflect on the strengths and shortcomings of his or her education. Each faculty member in the department documents that the consultation took place with his or her advisees in an email sent to the department coordinator, who then files it.

Students are formally required to demonstrate competence in oral presentation skills on two separate occasions in their training: when they present the results of their research in the methods course during their sophomore year and again for their capstone papers in their senior year, in the context of "mini-conferences" open to the public. In addition, many courses in anthropology also require oral presentations, and some of our majors also present their work at national conferences.

Capstone Experience

Anthropology majors are required to earn four semester hours in a capstone course (Senior Seminar 490). Within the course, the students prepare their senior thesis. One half of the course, however, is devoted to assessment of their educational experience here at Macalester and within the anthropology department in particular. The students evaluate their 1) intellectual growth, 2) acquisition of skills, 3) general education, 4) writing and oral skills, and 5) knowledge of anthropological theory and methods.

By conducting this evaluation at the *beginning* of the seminar, we are able to structure in new opportunities for correcting some of the problems or oversights in the students' education. For example, if the students feel that they had enough writing practice but not enough oral training, we have time to work on those skills (either through our class or using other campus resources). Similarly, we can work on methodological training, devote more time to theory, or adjust the final semester to overcome some of the problems.

Our Capstone Experience functions as an exit interview. In our experience, we have found that this format works best. A single interview is not enough time to discuss all the issues, and we have found that one-on-one student interviews are not nearly as dynamic and informative as the group interviews where the students stimulate discussion and a greater exchange of ideas.

Within Senior Seminar, we include training for the students in how to write a resume, how to apply for a job, to graduate school or for a grant. These components complement the major achievement which students focus on in Senior Seminar—the writing and public presentation of their Senior Capstone Thesis. While students are encouraged to collect a large variety of work, we concentrate in this course on one major achievement for each student as an indication of that student's accomplishments in anthropology.

The Senior Thesis provides an opportunity to assess all of the general skill objectives we have articulated for Anthropology majors: the ability to communicate orally and in

writing; an ability to conduct research in anthropology; an ability to conduct literature searches; an ability to engage in paradigmatic reasoning (understand the linkages among data, method, and theory); and an ability to read, write, listen, and speak anthropologically.

The Senior Seminar is a way to assess the student's education and improve it before graduation. Feedback from Senior Seminar helps to shape the ongoing development of the department in terms of curriculum, topical areas covered, and personnel.

Survey

Anthropology students will be surveyed at graduation and five years afterward regarding their employment status, educational status, and their assessment of their education in the anthropology program at Macalester College. See Appendix 1.

D. Timeline to implement strategies

We have in place a system of assessment that measures student achievement in terms of our learning goals and outcomes over the course of the academic year, culminating for members of the senior class in the comprehensive assessment they undergo in the capstone course. The on-going assessment that takes place in the capstone course is the responsibility of the instructors for that course (currently Dianna Shandy and Arjun Guneratne), while the survey of seniors administered to the graduating class during their senior spring, as part of the capstone course, is the responsibility of Ron Barrett. We do not have a timeline to implement assessment strategies; the assessment strategies the department has determined on are already being implemented and have been for some time. We have no plans to add to these measures.

We were unable to implement our original plan to conduct an alumni survey because we were unable to gain access to the alumni database. If this situation changes in the future, we will revisit the issue of an alumni survey.