

Department of Anthropology, University of Colorado Denver

Assessment Plan, 2008

Introduction

As a social sciences field, anthropology is unique in that its four subfields of specializations form a basis for a holistic approach for the inquiry of the biological and cultural evolution of our species thus bridging natural sciences, humanities and social sciences in understanding the human condition. The increasing need for education on human diversity is evident in many spheres. Issues concerning human diversity are a significant and growing concern, not only in educational systems, but in the corporate environment, health care and social services, sports, entertainment, and the legal system. Therefore, anthropology, by the very nature of the discipline is well positioned to tackle these issues and has, in fact, already made great strides at UCD. This is particularly true of issues of diversity. Because the very definition of the discipline involves the study of human diversity, anthropology is in the forefront with regards to its curricular offerings on the topic at the Denver Downtown Campus. More specifically, issues of diversity are integrated into every class taught in the department. Therefore, as a field that forms one of the campus-wide core courses (biological and cultural anthropology) in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), it is imperative that our students (graduates and undergraduates) receive a value added education that will not only prepare them to become responsible citizens but also have the skills and ability to appropriately interpret scientific inquiries and communicate effectively the knowledge they acquired.

The Anthropology Department developed an assessment plan where undergraduate and graduate students learning outcomes were continuously evaluated and feedback mechanisms were specified in the 2004-2005 academic year. This plan was updated in fall 2006 as part of the continuing process of improving the plan. In 2006 the department adopted specific outcomes that were most significant in evaluating how successful our undergraduate program in anthropology was and the extent to which our assessment method effectively measured the targeted goals. Individual course-embedded assessments were introduced and continue to be conducted by faculty: some of the outcomes which tend to be relevant to multiple classes are used as benchmarks. Furthermore, for some classes the assessment instruments tend to focus to specific goals with an approach that is fluid and dynamic (including interviews, tests, and surveys). However, as part of the CLAS efforts to develop an efficient, standardized and more informative outcome measures, the department plans to implement an assessment method (combining direct and indirect measurement) which will better address the following key issues related to our undergraduate and graduate program:

- How successful is our undergraduate and graduate program in preparing our students in critical thinking especially in the evaluation of information and knowledge communicated to them?
- Does the program adequately provide students the tools required to effectively solve complex research problems? Does the program provide an enriching educational experience to our undergraduate and graduate students?
- Do our students understand and effectively apply the basic scientific research methods in social sciences to solve or gain important information that could be used to improve the human condition?
- Can our students effectively share and/or communicate information to their peers or the general public that they may have acquired from a research project or class assignment?

Department Mission

The mission of the department of anthropology at UCD reflects the mission statement of CLAS and the University of Colorado at Denver in that:

A. Undergraduate education in anthropology

- The department considers undergraduate education in anthropology being a central part of Liberal arts education in CLAS and puts forward a view of the field that is broad and encompassing. Specifically, Anthropology "considers human beings as biological and social entities and seeks to explain both diversities and commonalities of peoples and cultures; for undergraduates, anthropology provides a rich overview of human life" (see UCD 2006-2007 catalogue).
- The department has made a commitment to expose undergraduate students to all four of the traditional sub-disciplines of Anthropology. To provide the overview of the field called for by this commitment, the department offers core classes in all four sub-disciplines and students are required to take classes in three of the four sub-disciplines. In addition to the elective classes that deal with anthropological theory, the department offers undergraduates a series of classes directed at basic skills needed to pursue a career in anthropology including research design and methodology, specific analytical skills (e.g. human osteology, lithic analysis), and opportunities for field work.

Learning Goals

To insure that anthropology majors in our undergraduate program receive a well rounded four-field based education that allows them to successfully compete in the job market as well as pursuing graduate studies elsewhere, it is imperative that all majors and minors

will:

1. Develop an understanding of the foundations of anthropology—concepts, theories, and knowledge—how these ideas articulate with the ethical practice of anthropology.
2. Develop an appreciation and understanding of human diversity—similarities and differences among people through time and across the world—with an appreciation of cultural richness of the world.
3. Develop an understanding of the process of critical thinking within the social sciences as it applies to the field of anthropology and develop a command of the research methods needed to understand and engage with complex social and cultural issues as social scientists and responsible citizens.

Therefore, during their tenure in the program, students will progress towards the above listed goals by developing skills that will allow them successfully to:

1. Demonstrate familiarity with the history of anthropological thoughts, theories, and current major schools of thought within the discipline.
2. Demonstrate familiarity with human diversity, particularly people and cultures in at least one geographic region of the world over time.
3. Apply anthropological research methods in collecting, organizing, and analyzing data in at least one subfield of anthropology.
4. Demonstrate competence in reading and critical evaluation of information from the perspective of social science and from the perspectives of anthropological theory and ethics, thus fulfilling requirements for the well rounded liberal arts education.
5. Demonstrate their ability to effectively communicate their thoughts orally and in writing.

Assessment

The department will utilize a triangulated method (a combination of assessment methods) based on summative and formative measures to collect data and evaluate student outcomes:

1. **Formative:** this will include advisement, conversations, questionnaires, surveys and class evaluations, where the faculty will monitor students' progress and outcomes. This will also incorporate feedback obtained from regular department meetings particularly those addressing or discussing pedagogical approaches.
- 2) **Summative:** the department currently does not require graduating seniors to take an exit exam, but as part of the honors program for the undergraduates some capstone courses will be used for the evaluation (ANTH 4050 and ANTH 4810). Furthermore, faculty may be able to identify graduating seniors and provide them with a set of questions that will focus on topics and overarching themes within the discipline: questions and concepts presented in the core courses. It is expected

that seniors should pass with a grade of 75% correct or better, the department could use this as a benchmark to assess the program. Ideally this will be offered in the last semester of the senior year for graduating majors.

- 3) Contact with *Alumni/ae* will be maintained to obtain their views on the program particularly concerning improvements and revisions and to monitor their professional development.

Furthermore, since the goal of this plan is to systematically assess students learning outcomes, the assessment will focus on:

- **Cognitive outcome** - students' knowledge about anthropology: their comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation of anthropological information. A pool of exam questions developed and administered in all 1000- and 2000-level courses (pre & post students knowledge evaluation), will be used to set up benchmarks to measure levels of students achievement. A randomly selected sample of students 10 students or 10% of the total number of students from the following courses; ANTH 1302, ANTH 1303, and ANTH 2102 will be used. Data collected every semester will be crucial in assessment of students' outcomes and will be used as benchmark to further examine whether target goals have been reached. First and foremost, a desired outcome is the demonstration of critical thinking in the evaluation of information. This is of the utmost importance as conflicting data and ideas may be presented and multiple interpretations may be put forward. It is crucial that students be able to evaluate how data is collected and analyzed so that they can critically examine these conflicting claims and interpretations. Additionally, students must have a firm grasp of the concepts of cultural relativism and competing cultural voices to understand multiple, and often conflicting, claims of authority.
- **Effective outcome** – a set of questionnaires will be deployed to all anthropology majors/minors in order to gather data that will be used to examine what students care about. The evaluation process will emphasize student input about their: attitude towards anthropology, their interests and preferences within the four sub-discipline of anthropology, achievement and success while they are in the program, and after they have graduated.
- **Performance outcome** – faculty teaching upper level courses such as ANTH 3101, ANTH 3112, ANTH 3301, and ANTH 3512 usually evaluate student's skilled performances in the four subfields of anthropology. A randomly selected pool of papers (short essays) from 3000- and 4000-level select courses (ANTH 4050 and ANTH 4810) will be evaluated by faculty (not those teaching these courses), where clarity, understanding of concepts, critical thinking and proper application of research methods will be evaluated. Another important outcome of our program is the ability of our students to propose, design, conduct and interpret research projects. The research design process is at the heart of all research in Anthropology

and cannot occur in the absence of this knowledge. Finally, students should be able to demonstrate knowledge of key theories and methods in at least three of the four sub-disciplines.

Assessment Rubric

The following rubric will be followed:

Learning outcomes	Assessment Measures	Assessment Schedule
<p>1. All majors and minors will have an understanding of basic anthropological concepts, theories, and knowledge.</p>	<p>Students familiarity with the history of anthropological thoughts as well as major schools of thought within the discipline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students will learn these basic concepts in ANTH 1302, 1303, and 2102. <p>Students' competence in applying the methods of collecting , organizing, and analyzing data in at least one subfield of anthropology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students will learn the methods of data analysis in at least one subfield in ANTH 3101, 3121, 3301, and 3512 	
<p>2. All majors and minors will demonstrate an integrated knowledge, awareness, and understanding of a culturally and biologically diverse world.</p>	<p>Students' familiarity with human diversity and cultures in at least one geographic region, and over time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students will learn this in ANTH 3142, 4260, 4190, and 3500 - Students are encouraged to participate in experiential learning through Study Abroad, volunteer work, and through service learning 	

	opportunities.	
3. All majors and minors will understand the process of critical thinking within the discipline and must demonstrate the ability to understand complex research problems and articulate appropriate methods and theory.	<p>Students' critical thinking and evaluation of information and articulation of their knowledge at least in one of the subfield. Furthermore students should be able to develop a research question or problem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students will learn this in ANTH 3910, 3512, 4050, 4101, and 4810 	

B. Graduate education in anthropology

- Graduate education in Anthropology at UCD is much more focused (less broad) than the undergraduate program. Because of the small size of the faculty, the Department has chosen to emphasize four areas, or tracks: 1) Medical Anthropology, 2) Archaeological Studies, 3) Biological Anthropology, and 4) Sustainable Development and Political Ecology.
- Cross cutting these tracks are a series of six themes along which faculty integrate research and teaching, thus imparting both research skills and knowledge needed in the discipline. These collaborations give students a broader range of faculty with which to interact and from whom to draw thesis committees than would occur if a more traditional division along sub-discipline, or even tracks, were followed. Additionally, it has opened up access to scholars in other departments in the University for both the faculty and students.

Focus Themes

Ethnicity, Identity and Group Formation: Past and Present: This theme recognizes how individuals define themselves and join into alliances with others greatly affects the nature of economic and social organization, be it exchange of food among hunter-gatherers or participation in a development project in the fourth world today. As such it touches not only on archaeology and sustainable development, but also political science, public policy, and sociology.

Medical Anthropology: Human Biology, Health and the Environment: This theme broadly encompasses the interaction between humans and their environment (social and ecological) as it relates to health. Included in this theme are issues of modern human variation in terms of adaptation to variable environments as well as the nature of health disparities and the allocation of health care resources. As such, it incorporates issues of natural selection, epidemiology, public health, and critical medical anthropology.

Paleoecology and human evolution: Paleoecology concentrates on understanding past organisms (plants and animals) and how these organisms interact in the physical environment. Both biological and archaeological anthropologists have long studied the relationship between human evolution and human organization and the ecological environment humans inhabit. This theme brings the members of the anthropology department into cooperation with the departments of geography, geology, and biology.

Biosocial and Behavioral Ecology: This theme explicitly examines behavior from an evolutionary and ecological context and is concerned with understanding fitness-enhancing behaviors. This theme is theoretical grounded in natural selection and sociobiology and thus encourages collaboration with evolutionary psychologists, biologist and ecologists.

Politics and Environment: Contemporary, Historic and Prehistoric: This theme looks at the interplay between the availability of resources and the control and exploitation of resources in political organization. It opens up connections with political science and history.

Political Ecology, Sustainable Development and Cultural Heritage: This theme provides a critical, integrated, and multidisciplinary perspective on the issues of development, resource and historic conservation and their ties to concepts of identity. As such it encourages interaction with political science, history, public policy and the historic preservation program in the College of Architecture.