2012-2013 Annual Program Assessment Report

Please submit report to your department chair or program coordinator, the Associate Dean of your College and the assessment office by Monday, September 30, 2013. You may submit a separate report for each program which conducted assessment activities.

College: SBS

Department: Anthropology

Program:

Assessment liaison: James E. Snead

In 2013-2013 the Department of Anthropology continued to build on the strong assessment priorities set out in our 2011-2016 Program Assessment Plan. At the core of this process is a commitment to evidence-based evaluation of program goals and a commitment to "closing the loop" by implementing appropriate changes. The assessment program proceeded as per the departmental assessment plan, which mandates evaluation of two departmental Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) per year. This followed a significant revision of the PLOs to reflect changing curricular emphases in the department and the contributions of new faculty.

Overview of Annual Assessment Project(s). Provide a brief overview of this year's assessment plan and process.

The goals of this year's assessment were as follows:

1) Continue our follow through regarding the Revision of Undergraduate and Graduate SLOs that took place in the 2011-2012 year
2) Development of new strategies of direct assessment for undergraduate and graduate SLOs
3) Continue efforts to more clearly scaffold thesis preparation for Graduate students
4) Collection of data and contact information of alumni and graduating students.

1. **Assessment Buy-In.** Describe how your chair and faculty were involved in assessment related activities. Did department meetings include discussion of student learning assessment in a manner that included the department faculty as a whole?

The Assessment Committee in the Department of Anthropology facilitated work on assessment in consultation with (and with support of) the Chair, who has ultimate oversight, and with input from all Department members. This year's Committee included 2 faculty beside the Liaison; it included 1 member from each of the 3 sub-fields of Anthropology represented in the Dept. Assessment continues to be a topic of lively discussion among the Anthropology faculty. Assessment was also a topic for our annual departmental retreat, held in August, and may play a role in a new winter retreat now in the planning stage. We are gradually seeing an evolution from simply asserting ideas about program and student performance towards the systematic assessment of such concepts so that implementation can be coordinated.

2. Student Learning Outcome Assessment Project. Answer items a-f for each SLO assessed this year. If you assessed an additional SLO, copy and paste items a-f below, BEFORE you answer them here, to provide additional reporting space.

3a. Which Student Learning Outcome was measured this year?

Undergraduate program SLOs:

SLO 6 (*Discuss anthropological theories and paradigms, how they have changed over time and how they are applied to explain fundamental aspects of the human condition such as cultural diversity and social change*)
 SLO 10 (*Develop effective communication using anthropological standards*)

The undergraduate program SLOs were assessed in Anthropology 151 (Introduction to Cutural Anthropology), 153 (Introduction to Archaeology), and 303 (Introduction to Anthropological Thought) in Fall 2012.

Graduate program SLOs:

SLO 6 (*Analyze anthropological theories and paradigms, how they have changed over time and how they are applied to explain fundamental aspects of the human condition such as cultural diversity and social change*)
SLO 10 (*Communicate effectively using anthropological standards*).

The graduate program SLOs were assessed in Anthropology 601 (Seminar in Anthropological Theory) in Fall 2012 and Anthropology 606 (Problems in Archaeology) in Spring 2013.

3b. Does this learning outcome align with one or more of the university's Big 5 Competencies? (Delete any which do not apply)

- Critical Thinking
- Oral Communication
- Written Communication
- Information Literacy

3c. Does this learning outcome align with University's commitment to supporting diversity through the cultivation and exchange of a wide variety of ideas and points of view? In what ways did the assessed SLO incorporate diverse perspectives related to race, ethnic/cultural identity/cultural orientations, religion, sexual orientation, gender/gender identity, disability, socio-economic status, veteran status, national origin, age, language, and employment rank?

The Department of Anthropology is highly cognizant of the university's desire to foster broad perspectives on topical issues. It is also a fundamental element of our discipline. Incorporating "diversity" into our assessment process, however, is a problem that has not yet been effectively resolved. To date we have addressed this topic strictly via course content. Indirect assessment of diversity issues would be relatively straightforward to add to our standing protocol. Direct assessment is a greater challenge. Both will be part of our preparation for assessment in the 2014-15 academic year, for which planning will begin in Spring 14.

3d. What direct and/or indirect instrument(s) were used to measure this SLO?

In the 2012-13 year anthropology focused on the adaptation of signature assignments as direct instruments for assessment. In order to evaluate the applicability of different forms of signature assignment, we took advantage of the subfield organization that characterizes the department to implement signature assignments focused on

1) Written prompts(cultural anthropology)
2) Visual prompts (archaeology)

This allowed assessment of the SLOs that addressed both "content" and form." As outlined in our assessment plan, courses that addressed cultural theory were to use a writing prompt to "Discuss the concept of 'culture' from an anthropological perspective." Courses addressing archeological theory would use a visual/writing prompt: the students will be shown a depiction of a famous ancient artifact, and asked to respond to the following question: "How would archeologists interpret this artifact?"

Implementation of these prompts was developed via discussion among faculty teaching the relevant courses, resulting in the following modifications:

1) Writing prompt (Anth 151/303):
2) Visual prompt/writing prompt (Anth 153):

"What does this artifact tell us about the society that created it?"

In concept, these two different prompts would provide information both as to the "content" of the question and to the effectiveness of the instrument itself. The instrument selected for assessing graduate SLO 10 (communication) differed in that we opted to incorporate professional socialization into the exercise (see below).

3e. Describe the assessment design methodology: For example, was this SLO assessed longitudinally (same students at different points) or was a cross-sectional comparison used (Comparing freshmen with seniors)? If so, describe the assessment points used.

The assessment design was intended to provide a preliminary look at competence in departmental SLOs that have not previously been assessed. Thus the approaches developed can be considered experimental. Knowledge of "theory" is considered central to understanding anthropology, yet how can such knowledge be evaluated outside of the traditional grading framework? How can "competence" in these concepts be defined?

Accordingly, SLO 6 was assessed cross-sectionally, with similar information elicited from entry-level GE classes, upper division courses predominantly filled with junior-senior Anthropology majors, and MA students at the midpoint of their graduate careers.

In keeping with our long-term interest in communication, graduate students were also assessed for their competence in professional presentations. Since "posters" are an increasingly common method of presentation at academic conferences, we evaluated student presentations in poster mode for Anth 606. Currently there is no mode to assess such skills within our undergraduate student body, since this presentation mode is not presently used in courses at this level.

3f. Assessment Results & Analysis of this SLO: Provide a summary of how the results were analyzed and highlight findings from the collected evidence.

Cultural Anthropology

Anth 151: SLO 6 (undergraduate: cultural: Prof. Rachel Giraudo) Anth 151 was used as a forum in which to assess cultural theory at the introductory (I) level of proficiency. The limited familiarity of the entry-level student audience with this concept in general required some modification of the prompt, as follows:

"How do these theoretical perspectives in anthropology – historical particularism, functionalism, and interpretive anthropology – compare in their approach to culture? Provide examples."

The instrument was administered to the 45 students in the class, generating short, handwritten essays. As evaluated on a point scale, the average performance was 75.6%.

Anth 303: SLO 6 (undergraduate: cultural/upper division: Prof. Christina Von Mayrhauser) . Anth 303 was used as a forum in which to assess cultural theory at the intermediate (P) level of proficiency. Using the prompt "discuss the concept of 'culture' from an anthropological perspective," the instrument was employed in mid-semester.

Anth 606: SLO 6 (graduate, cultural: Prof. Kimberly Kirner) Anth 601 was used as a forum in which to assess cultural theory at the demonstrated (D) level of proficiency. The instrument was administered to the 13 students in the class mid-semester, generating short essays. Ten minutes in class was devoted to the effort, which was subsequently typed up for evaluation.

Archaeology

Anth 153: SLO 6 (undergdraduate: archaeology: Prof. James Snead). Anth 153 was used as a forum in which to assess archaeological theory at the introductory level of proficiency. The use of the visual prompt was designed to take advantage of the "material" aspect of the subdiscipline as well as to test comprehension of theory. Unlike the circumstances with the cultural anthropology, we were unable to apply this instrument to an upper division course, thus using the results from the 153 assessment as a benchmark for further evaluation (see below). The instrument was administered to 66 students in Anth 153 (section 1) and 45 students in 153 (section 2).

<u>Evaluation</u>. Results of our assessment of SLO 6 are mixed. Culture is a core concept of anthropology, and the evaluation of material information is central to archaeology. General concepts such as these, however, prove challenging to assess, given the relatively fluid nature of the concepts being evaluated. Ironically this challenge is at the core of what anthropology "is." Anthropologists accept this ambiguity, but examining student understanding of the concept remains difficult.

It is evident that increased coordination of instrument development/application will also be required. Ambiguity as to the amount of time available to address the prompt, for instance, hinders further analysis. The signature assignment used in Anth 153 also generated ambiguity. Better coordination from the Assessment Committee/Liaison will be needed to address such issues in the future.

The data compiled by Prof. Giraudo for Anth 151 provides additional insights into writing/communication skills possessed by students in our Gen Ed classes. One particularly striking element of the writing prompt evaluated in this regard is a consistent failure to complete the exercise as assigned – specifically, to provide "examples." Anecdotal evidence suggests that this problem is widespread in both undergraduate and graduate courses, leading to surmise regarding the preparation of students for college-level analysis. Since this was not specifically evaluated, and since we do not have comparative data from the upper division, so the strength of this insight can be questioned. Nonetheless addressing matters of the structure of reasoning is central to our coursework, and these insights have direct application.

Evidence from the assessment of theory in Anth 601 emphasizes subdivisional divides within the anthropology program. In general, the more complex constructions of the concept of "culture" within the collected data derive from graduate students on the "General Anthropology" track, which includes students focusing on cultural anthropology. Their essays indicates solid familiarity with the concept.

Evaluation of the signature assignment approach also produces mixed results. The need to adapt to different student audiences and the relatively elastic nature of definitions of "theory" makes comparison difficult. The "Visual" prompt used for the evaluation of archaeology theory proved particularly problematic. Evaluation of the data suggest that students were confused by the nature of the question itself: were they being asked 'what the artifact is' (i.e., identification)? 'What the artifact 'means' in context (not provided)? In other words, was this an exercise in memory or an exercise in analysis? The brevity of the prompt – selected for the purpose of simplicity -

Graduate SLO 10: Communication.

Anth 606 (Archaeology).   Anthro 606 was used as a forum for assessing graduate student competence in communication. The instrument was the final class project, a prototype research poster showcasing results of student research conducted over the course of the semester. There were 21 students in the class, with 20 completing the work. Proficiency (D) was demonstrated in 19 of these cases.

Evaluation. High levels of proficiency demonstrated in the 606 poster projects reflect an increased emphasis on professionalization and communication in the graduate student curriculum. Assessment in the 2011-12 year generated considerable revision of classroom approaches to these matters, particularly the provision of consistent information as to professional standards of format, approach, etc. It is evident that by building these approaches into course material – rather than treating them as something students pick up "along the way," higher performance can be achieved.

3g. Use of Assessment Results of this SLO: Describe how assessment results were used to improve student learning. Were assessment results from previous years or from this year used to make program changes in this reporting year? (Possible changes include: changes to course content/topics covered, changes to course sequence, additions/deletions of courses in program, changes in pedagogy, changes to student advisement, changes to student support services, revisions to program SLOs, new or revised assessment instruments, other academic programmatic changes, and changes to the assessment plan.)

        Concern among department faculty as to student grasp of core theoretical concepts was the stimulus for SLO 6. This was, however, our first attempt to evaluate the SLO, so that much of our "takeaway" from this effort concerns the assessment process itself. Faculty were apprised of assessment results, with the suggestion that "theory" was a) reasonably understood by our undergraduates, b) there was some progress in expanding this understanding between entry-level and advanced students, but that c) the process by which these trends were assessed required reform.

Encouraging "evidence-based argument" will also require curricular innovation. This is, of course, a broader concern, but armed with evidence that this is a widespread phenomenon faculty are empowered to respond directly. Thus pedagogical changes are the primary result.

The lessons of SLO 6 have been applied to Anth 153 in Fall 2013 in two ways. First, emphasis on core theoretical concepts in archaeology has increased. Second, use of specific case studies in class reading has been significantly expanded. This required moving away from formal textbooks towards "readers" and web-based assignments conveyed via moodle. Although SLO 6 is not being assessed over all in the current academic year, the assessment instrument used in Fall 2012 will be re-administered here. Thus a baseline will be established to generate further evidence. The same instrument will be implemented in Anth 427, so that the understanding of theoretical concepts in upper division coursework can be achieved.

4. Assessment of Previous Changes: Present documentation that demonstrates how the previous changes in the program resulted in improved student learning.

Since the SLOs currently under evaluation were previously revised, the assessment currently in use is designed to assess their effectiveness. Thus the current round of assessments is establishing a baseline against which future program/pedagogical innovations can be measured.

5. Changes to SLOs? Please attach an updated course alignment matrix if any changes were made. (Refer to the Curriculum Alignment Matrix Template, http://www.csun.edu/assessment/forms_guides.html.)

SLOs were not changed in the 2012-13 year.

6. Assessment Plan: Evaluate the effectiveness of your 5 year assessment plan. How well did it inform and guide your assessment work this academic year? What process is used to develop/update the 5 year assessment plan? Please attach an updated 5 year assessment plan for 2013-2018. (Refer to Five Year Planning Template, plan B or C, http://www.csun.edu/assessment/forms_guides.html.)

Anthropology continues to be guided by the five year (2011-16, attached) assessment plan produced during SLO revision. We consider the goals established by this process to be achievable, particularly because this was the first year in which the assessment of multiple SLOs was attempted. Under these circumstances we did not update the current five-year plan. Assessment activities scheduled for Spring 14 are designed to take this next step.

The following elements are targeted for inclusion in the updated five-year plan:
   a. Assessment of incoming Transfer students. Considerable concern has been expressed by faculty that our lack of knowledge regarding transfer students from community colleges is an impediment to curriculum development. It is also an unknown variable in the performance of Anthropology majors, since a significant proportion of our students in the upper division have completed prerequisites at the community college level but are new to the CSUN program.   Anecdotal evidence suggests that these students have a lower level of preparation, but at present our program neither assesses their status nor takes account of their possibly disparate performance. Assessment results on this topic will allow for appropriate intervention.

b. Program outcomes (alumni). Expansion of the alumni survey to incorporate more detailed information as to career trajectory. Concern has been expressed that our upper division coursework is not sufficiently flexible for changes in the marketplace: assessment instruments will be employed to generate evidence on this subject leading to curricular modification.

7. Has someone in your program completed, submitted or published a manuscript which uses or describes assessment activities in your program? Please provide citation or discuss.

No publications on departmental assessment have as yet been produced.

8. **Other information, assessment or reflective activities or processes not captured above.**