

Detailed Assessment Report  
As of: 10/04/2012 08:35 AM EST  
2011-2012 Anthropology MA

### Mission / Purpose

The graduate program in anthropology is committed to extending the mission of the university, the college and the department by providing a comprehensive four field education in the discipline, developing written and oral communication skills, and enhancing student research and field skills, particularly in the areas of archaeology, forensic science and cultural heritage studies. Students will be prepared for careers in anthropology or alternatively prepared for continued graduate work at the doctoral level.

### Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives, with Any Associations and Related Measures, Targets, Findings, and Action Plans

#### **SLO 1: Demonstrate understanding of theories and methods of ethnology**

All students in the MA program in anthropology are required to take three core seminars, including the seminar in ethnology. All students must demonstrate a masters-level understanding of theories and research methodology in the subfield of ethnology.

#### Related Measures:

##### **M 1: Ethnology research paper**

All graduate students are required to take a 3 credit-hour Seminar in Ethnology in their first year of the program. In this course they will write an independent research paper on a topic in ethnology.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

#### Connected Document

- *review*

#### **Target:**

At least 80% of students will earn a grade of 80% or better on the research paper in ethnology when graded using a departmentally agreed-upon rubric to assess knowledge of key concepts and research methods in the subfield.

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

In Spring 2012, 100% (6/6) students earned 80% or better on the research paper in ethnology. This course is offered once per year.

##### **M 2: Ability to present research findings in ethnology**

All graduate students are required to take a three-credit hour Seminar in Ethnology during their first year of the program. Students in this seminar will be required to present research findings from academic articles and books to the class to demonstrate their understanding of the material.

Source of Evidence: Presentation, either individual or group

#### **Target:**

At least 80% of students will earn a grade of 80% or better on the research presentations in ethnology when graded using a departmentally agreed-upon rubric to assess knowledge of key concepts and research methods in the subfield.

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

In Spring 2012, 100% (6/6) students earned 80% or better on the research presentation in ethnology. This course is offered once per year.

## **SLO 2: Demonstrate understanding of theories and methods of physical anthropology**

All students in the MA program in anthropology are required to take three core seminars, including the seminar in physical anthropology. All students must demonstrate a masters-level understanding of theories and research methodology in the subfield of physical anthropology.

### Related Measures:

#### **M 3: Comprehensive final in physical anthropology seminar**

All students in the MA program will take the Seminar in Physical Anthropology during their first year in the graduate program. All students will take a comprehensive final exam, which will be graded using a departmentally agreed-upon rubric assessing their knowledge of theories and research methods in the subfield.

Source of Evidence: Writing exam to assure certain proficiency level

#### **Target:**

At least 80% of students will earn a grade of 80% or better on the comprehensive final in physical anthropology when graded using a departmentally agreed-upon rubric to assess knowledge of key concepts and research methods in the subfield.

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Not Met**

In Spring 2012, 67% (4/6) of students earned a grade of 80% or better on the comprehensive final in physical anthropology. This course is offered once per year.

#### **M 4: Research project in physical anthropology**

All graduate students enrolled in the Seminar in Physical Anthropology will be required to complete a research project in which they critically evaluate a topic of their choice in physical anthropology. This project will be graded using a standardized rubric assessing their knowledge of central methodology and concepts in the subfield.

Source of Evidence: Project, either individual or group

#### **Target:**

At least 80% of students will earn a grade of 80% or better on the research project in physical anthropology when graded using a departmentally agreed-upon rubric to assess knowledge of key concepts and research methods in the subfield.

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

In Spring 2012, 100% (6/6) students earned 80% or better on the research project in physical anthropology. This course is offered once per year.

## **SLO 3: Demonstrate understanding of theories and methods of archaeology**

All students in the MA program in anthropology are required to take three core seminars, including the seminar in archaeology. All students must demonstrate a masters-level understanding of theories and research methodology in the subfield of archaeology.

### Related Measures:

#### **M 5: Comprehensive final in archaeology seminar**

All graduate students will take the Seminar in Archaeology during their first year, and at the end of that seminar they will take a comprehensive final exam covering core concepts and research methods in the subfield.

Source of Evidence: Writing exam to assure certain proficiency level

**Target:**

At least 80% of students will earn a grade of 80% or better on the comprehensive final in archaeology when graded using a departmentally agreed-upon rubric to assess knowledge of key concepts and research methods in the subfield.

**Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

In Spring 2012, 100% (6/6) students earned 80% or better on the comprehensive final in the graduate seminar on archaeology. This course is offered once per year.

**M 6:Archaeology research paper**

All students in the MA program must take the Seminar in Archaeology in their first year in the program. As part of that class, students are required to write a research paper demonstrating knowledge of key theories and research methods in archaeology.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

**Target:**

At least 80% of students will earn a grade of 80% or better on the research paper in archaeology when graded using a departmentally agreed-upon rubric to assess knowledge of key concepts and research methods in the subfield.

**Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

In Spring 2012, 100% (6/6) students earned 80% or better on the research paper in the archaeology seminar. This course is offered once per year.

**SLO 4:Demonstrate masters-level proficiency in subfield of specialization**

All students in the MA program will select a specialty subfield in anthropology for their research focus. They must demonstrate appropriate proficiency in their area.

**Related Measures:**

**M 7:Defense of thesis or project proposal**

Students in the MA program are required to write and defend a thesis or project proposal that demonstrates their knowledge of their research area and the ability to design a research project. This thesis proposal will be evaluated by a committee of faculty for coverage of research literature and appropriateness for a masters-level research project, using a standard rubric. The proposal must be accepted by each person on the committee.

Source of Evidence: Senior thesis or culminating major project

**Target:**

A minimum of 80% of students will successfully defend a thesis or project proposal within six months of passing their comprehensive exams.

**Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Not Met**

Of the nine students taking their comprehensive exam in August 2011, three (33%) defended a thesis proposal by June 2012.

**M 8:Demonstration of proficiency in comprehensive exam area question**

Students in the graduate program are required to take comprehensive exams at the start of their second year in the program. As part of the exam, students will answer a question on their particular area of specialization. All students must pass this question in order to progress in the program.

Source of Evidence: Comprehensive/end-of-program subject matter exam

**Target:**

At least 80% of students in the MA program who take the comprehensive exam at the start of fall will pass the specialization area question. This question will be graded independently by all faculty on the student's committee using a standardized rubric to assess masters-level proficiency.

**Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

Of the nine students who took comprehensive exams in August 2011, 100% (9/9) passed their specialization area question.

**SLO 5: Demonstrate the ability to design and conduct independent research in anthropology**

All students in the MA program must show that they are able to initiate, plan, and execute their own research in their appropriate subfield of anthropology.

**Related Measures:****M 9: Demonstration of proficiency in comprehensive exam on methods**

Students in the graduate program are required to take comprehensive exams at the start of their second year in the program. As part of the exam, students will answer a question on research methodology in their subfield. All students must pass this question in order to progress in the program.

Source of Evidence: Comprehensive/end-of-program subject matter exam

**Target:**

At least 80% of students in the MA program who take the comprehensive exam at the start of fall will pass the research methodology question. This question will be graded independently by all faculty on the student's committee using a standardized rubric.

**Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

Of the nine students who took comprehensive exams in August 2011, 100% (9/9) passed the research methodology question.

**M 10: Completion of thesis or project**

All students in the MA program are required to complete a thesis or project. The program is designed to be completed in approximately 24 months, so virtually all students should be able to complete their thesis or project and graduate within 29 months.

Source of Evidence: Senior thesis or culminating major project

**Target:**

100% of students who pass comprehensive exams at the start of their second year will complete their thesis or project within 16 months.

**Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Not Met**

Of the three students who took comprehensive exams in January 2011, none had completed a thesis or project by May 2012.

**Details of Action Plans for This Cycle (by Established cycle, then alpha)****Establish and enforce deadlines for milestones in the MA program**

Students will be given specific deadlines for selecting an adviser, forming a committee, and defending their proposal. With each deadline, students will be required to submit notification to the Department Chair, and students who don't meet deadlines will receive consequences in eligibility for assistance. These deadlines will accelerate progress through the program.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011

**Implementation Status:** In-Progress

**Priority:** High

**Responsible Person/Group:** Director of Graduate Studies and Department Chair

**Formally evaluate all graduate students annually regarding performance in the program**

Each March, the Department Chair will meet with all graduate faculty in the program to discuss the performance of graduate students in classes, at professional conferences, in research, and as graduate assistance. Using this information and grades, the Chair will provide a written evaluation of performance to the student and meet with each student one-on-one in April to complement successes and suggest improvements.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011

**Implementation Status:** In-Progress

**Priority:** High

**Responsible Person/Group:** Graduate faculty and chair

**Improve performance in the physical anthropology seminar**

During 2011-2012, performance on the comprehensive final exam in the physical anthropology seminar was below the target of 80% of students earning a minimum of 80% on the exam. Instead, only 67% of students earned this score. In part, the small size of the class had an impact on this percentage, as 4/6 earned well above 80%. The remaining two students both earned near 80% but did not quite make that level. Changes need to occur to improve student performance and ensure that at least the minimum (and ideally all) graduate students earn above 80% on the final exam.

**Established in Cycle:** 2011-2012

**Implementation Status:** In-Progress

**Priority:** High

**Implementation Description:** The professor of the course will include additional requirements during the term to encourage students to master the material as the semester progresses rather than wait until the end to see if all students have learned what they need to know.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Dr. Marie Danforth, professor of the course

**Additional Resources Requested:** None

**Increase number of students completing thesis/project on time**

Of the students taking comprehensive exams in January 2011, none had finished their thesis/project by May 2012. This slow time-to-graduation has been an on-going problem in the graduate program and one that we have taken steps to address (see earlier action plans). We have accelerated the course offering schedule and created new deadlines; these changes were implemented in the 2009-2010 cycle of graduate admissions, so I anticipate that we will see quicker graduation in the years to come. Close assessment needs to occur in 2012-2013, as the first group to take comps earlier (in August 2011) will be approaching their 16-month point for thesis/project completion.

**Established in Cycle:** 2011-2012

**Implementation Status:** In-Progress

**Priority:** High

**Implementation Description:** The chair and faculty in anthropology will work to encourage student completion and will track students closely to see if previous changes result in expedited thesis/project completion.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Drs. Miller & Danforth, anthropology faculty

**Increase percentage of students defending proposal on time**

In 2011-2012, only three of the students who took their comprehensive exam in August 2011 had defended a project/thesis proposal by June 2012. Although several students are planning to defend their proposal in summer 2012, they are still behind schedule. Changes need to occur in order to accelerate student progress through the program.

**Established in Cycle:** 2011-2012

**Implementation Status:** In-Progress

**Priority:** High

**Implementation Description:** In 2012-2013, an anthropology faculty focus group will be called to discuss the design and role of the thesis/project proposal. As it stands, students are engaging in thesis work prior to defending their proposal, and that process needs to be altered. By May 2013, the proposal defense process will be altered so that students defend much earlier in their research.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Dr. Marie Danforth

**Additional Resources Requested:** None

## Analysis Questions and Analysis Answers

### **What specifically did your assessments show regarding proven strengths or progress you made on outcomes/objectives?**

The MA program in anthropology continues to prepare students well for both jobs in anthropology and Ph.D. work at other universities. The seminars facilitate mastery of anthropological theories and methodology in a range of specialty areas, and faculty work closely with students to develop their own independent research skills. Over the past three years, we have made changes to the program in terms of the sequence of courses being offered and the timing of comprehensive exams (moved from the start of the fourth semester in the program to just before the third), all of which have been designed to accelerate students through the program. We have instituted deadlines for various milestones in the program and a created graduate student handbook to formalize these deadlines and other policies. The first cohort admitted after these changes is just completing its second year in the program, and we hope to see clear evidence this time next year of improvement in the time-to-degree of our students. The students have always excelled in job placement and admission to Ph.D. programs; we are now working to increase the timeliness of their successes.

### **What specifically did your assessments show regarding any outcomes/objectives that will require continued attention?**

Although we have made improvements to the MA program, we still need to increase the speed with which students progress from comprehensive exams to thesis/project proposals and thesis/project completion. As it is, students do well in coursework, present papers successfully at professional conferences, and pass comprehensive exams, but then they run out of funding and take too long to complete their thesis/project proposals. The faculty in anthropology will continue to work with the chair and the recently implemented deadlines to push students through the program in a timely fashion. In 2012-2013, we will hold faculty focus groups to assess the performance of current students and discuss strategies for improving their progress to degree.

## Annual Report Section Responses

### **Program Summary**

The MA program in anthropology continues to be a flourishing graduate program, attracting students from around the country and preparing them well for careers and further graduate work. In particular, our specialty areas of archaeology and physical anthropology have drawn students from a national pool and been highly successful and training these students to meet their post-graduation goals. All of our students, however, study the theories and research methods in three primary fields of anthropology (archaeology, cultural anthropology, and physical anthropology), and they gain valuable hands-on experience through lab and field work. In 2011-2012, twelve graduate students presented their research at regional and national conferences, including the American Anthropological Association, American Association of Physical Anthropologists, and Society of American Archaeology conferences. We regularly place students in excellent careers, particularly in archaeology, and our students also go on to receive funding at well-regarded Ph.D. programs (this year that includes the University of Nevada and the University of Alabama). In 2011-2012, eight students graduated with MA degrees in anthropology, and all of them are either employed or in further graduate school following their graduation from Southern Miss. The faculty in anthropology continue to work closely with the graduate students to ensure their success in research and to mentor them in their endeavors.

### **Continuous Improvement Initiatives**

The MA program in anthropology attracts students from around the country and does an exceptional job of teaching and training these students to be professional anthropologists. In order to build on the successes of the program and increase the marketability of the degree, we are currently in the process of making significant changes to the program in order to make it a degree that can be finished in 2.5 years (see various action plans). We have restructured the program and now look forward to increasing our advertising for the degree regionally and nationally in order to attract more and even better students.

### **Closing the Loop**

As detailed in the program-level action plans, the MA program in anthropology has been undergoing major changes over the past three years. Although the program has consistently produced excellent students over its history, a significant lag-time between completion of coursework and graduation has existed, and too many students have failed to complete their thesis in a timely fashion (or at all). As a result, efforts have been underway to assess the problem areas and identify action plans for improvement. Three years ago, the chair and program faculty identified specific areas needing change -- increased clarity in requirements and deadlines, more frequent offerings of required courses, changes to the time in which comprehensive exams are offered, and accelerated expected progress through the thesis/project. At this point, we are starting to see positive results from these changes, but we are only at the beginning of the time at which the first crop of students to enter with the new organization should be nearing graduation. By summer 2012, the degree to which our changes have been successful should be clearer. In 2012-2013, we will closely assess student progress.