

Detailed Assessment Report
2010-2011 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, with Any Associations and Related Measures, Achievement Targets, Findings, and Action Plans

O 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

Document:

- *review*

Achievement 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 (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met

In Spring 2011, 100% (12/12) 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

Achievement 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 (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met

In Spring 2011, 100% (12/12) students earned 80% or better on the research presentation in ethnology. This course is offered once per year.

O 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

Achievement 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 (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met

In Spring 2011, 88% (7/8) 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

Achievement 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 (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met

In Spring 2011, 100% (8/8) students earned 80% or better on the research project in physical anthropology. This course is offered once per year.

O 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

Achievement 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 (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met

In Spring 2011, 100% (14/14) 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

Achievement 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 (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met

In Spring 2011, 100% (14/14) students earned 80% or better on the research paper in the archaeology seminar. This course is offered once per year.

O 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

Achievement Target:

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

Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Not Met

Of the three students taking their comprehensive exam in January 2011, none had defended a thesis proposal by June 2011.

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

Achievement 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 (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met

The comprehensive exam will be given at the start of fall for the first time in August 2011. During 2010-2011, students took the exam during January 2011. Of the three students who took the exam at that time, 100% (3/3) passed the specialization area question.

O 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

Achievement 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 (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met

The comprehensive exam will be given at the start of fall for the first time in August 2011.

During 2010-2011, students took the exam during January 2011. Of the three students who took the exam at that time, 100% (3/3) 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

Achievement 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 (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Not Met

Of the six students who took comprehensive exams in January 2010, none had completed a thesis or project by May 2011.

Action Plan Details for This Cycle (by Established cycle, then alpha)

Revise comprehensive exam schedule

Offer comprehensive exam in August before second year of graduate school begins (rather than after the third semester, in January)

Established in Cycle: 2009-2010

Implementation Status: In-Progress

Priority: High

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

Analysis Answers

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

The program in anthropology continues to do an excellent job in training students in a range of research skills, teaching them core concepts and methodology in the subfields of the discipline, and facilitating student success in comprehensive examinations. All targets were met in three of the five outcomes. By the time they complete the coursework and exams for the program, students are able to demonstrate their understanding of central issues in the discipline, their ability to do research, and their knowledge of the literature in their subfield and their areas of focus for their research.

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

The program has continued to face challenges with getting students from the point of passing the comprehensive exam to a thesis proposal and completion. In 2010-2011, after considerable assessment and faculty focus group discussions, curriculum changes were implemented both in content and in the timeline. In particular, the number of required core seminars was reduced from four to three, and all required classes were offered in a single year rather than over a three-semester period. In the past, students took three semesters of core classes and then took their comprehensive exam in January of their second year. As a result, they were not seriously working on a thesis until mid-semester of their fourth semester in the program, which also is their last semester of funding. The findings presented here reflect the students of these earlier cohorts, none of whom defended a thesis proposal within six months of taking the exams, and none of whom graduated within 16 months of taking the exams. For 2010-2011, students completed all core seminars and were administered their comprehensive exam in August prior to the start of their second year. In addition, deadlines were established for selecting an adviser (fall of their first year), forming a committing (spring of their first year), and defending their thesis proposal (fall of their second year). We are continuing to monitor the progress of these students and are hopeful that the findings we have seen regarding student graduation will be reversed as this new cohort moves through.

Annual Reports

Program Summary

Our graduate program in anthropology is the largest, most comprehensive, and most successful anthropology program in the state of Mississippi. Over the past decade, forty master's degrees have been awarded, and our graduates have demonstrated a high level of success, both in PhD pursuit (e.g., at Georgia, Indiana, Florida State) and in employment in Mississippi and around the region. Our graduates are employed by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and by various libraries and museums, Cultural Resource Management firms, and the Mississippi Crime Lab. Students are so successful because the program sets high standards for research skill development as well as mastery of anthropological literature. When students graduate from the program, they have considerable research experience and are poised to excel, whether in a PhD program or in the workplace. The faculty in anthropology excel in research, continually bringing in grant dollars and publishing their scholarly work. In 2010-2011, the faculty in anthropology published three peer-reviewed articles (one co-authored with students) and a peer-reviewed book chapter as well as presented multiple papers at academic conferences. At the same time, faculty were highly involved in a range of service activities, including the College and University Advisory Committees, Grade Review Council, University Assessment Committee, and Graduate Council. The kinds of work that

anthropologists do also lends itself well to community involvement, and 2010-2011 was no exception. Dr. Marie Danforth utilized her forensic work to create "CSI: Hattiesburg," a traveling, interactive exhibit designed to teach children about how the tools of physical anthropology can be used to solve crimes. This engaging and fun project was enjoyed by elementary and middle school children in Hattiesburg and on the coast. In addition, Dr. Danforth's research on Greenwood Island unearthed the remains of Mexican-American War soldiers, which led to partnership with the local historical society and an eventual reburial ceremony on Memorial Day. During 2010-2011, Dr. Hayden also continued her involvement with local immigrant communities, chairing the board of a coast-based group, El Pueblo/The Village. The synergy between her own research on migration and place and her service to this board illustrates the engaged, active nature of the anthropology program as a whole. Our students certainly benefit from the highly productive and involved faculty with whom they work. In 2010-2011, the program in anthropology worked with the sociology program to host the second annual "Anthropology/Sociology Research Colloquium," a lecture series featuring students and faculty of our programs as well as high-profile scholars from other universities. We were pleased during this year to highlight the research of undergraduate students (4) as well as graduate students in Anthropology. In the fall, we hosted Dr. Mark Cohen, a Distinguished Professor of Anthropology from SUNY-Plattsburgh. In spring, we were honored to welcome Dr. Carol Stack, Professor Emeritus at UC-Berkeley. Dr. Stack is a highly acclaimed scholar, and her visit included not only a public lecture but also a writing workshop for faculty from across the university, a seminar with English graduate students, and meetings with undergraduates about their research. We hope to do more research events such as this in the future.

Continuous Improvement Initiatives

The MA program strives to improve the success of our students by decreasing the amount of time from admission to degree while still maintaining excellence. As discussed earlier, we have established action plans and are in the process of implementing significant change designed to accelerate student progress through the program as well as improve retention from course completion to graduation. In 2011-2012, we will assess our efforts and make any changes necessary to improve further.

Closing the Loop

Over the past several assessment cycles for the MA program in Anthropology, the primary focus has been on addressing the slow time-to-graduation that was identified in earlier cycles. Students who graduate do very well, but the numbers of students who do not graduate and the time it takes for students to progress through the program are too large. As a result, we have begun implementing program changes that were shown in assessment to be needed. In particular, we revised the core seminar requirement, reducing the seminars from four to three and offering them all in the first academic year (rather than spilling into the second year). As a result of the acceleration of required course offerings, we were then able to implement the second major change, which is offering the comprehensive exam in August prior to the second year starting rather than January of the second year. In doing so, our plan is for students to complete required seminars and pass their exam before starting their second year. In that third semester, they will take courses in their area and craft a proposal for the thesis; in spring or summer of their second year, they will then complete the thesis, as their funding is running out. This faster schedule is a dramatic change from previous student cohorts, and we look forward to assessing the progress of those who entered on this schedule (in fall 2010) and whether the changes implemented leads more students to graduate in a timely fashion. Beginning with 2011-2012, we are also instituting new deadlines for milestones in the program (e.g., defending one's proposal), and we are formally evaluating each graduate student's progress in the program annually. Together, we hope these changes will strengthen the graduate program and facilitate student success.