ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT PROGRAM
Twelfth Annual Assessment Meeting
8:30 – 9:45 a.m., Cramer Hall 141
June 4, 2015

Present
Shelby Anderson (Anthropological Archaeologist)
Virginia Butler (Anthropological Archaeologist)
Sharon Carstens (Socio-Cultural Anthropologist)
Michele Gamburd (Socio-Cultural Anthropologist)
Charles Klein (Socio-Cultural Anthropologist)
Jeremy Spoon (Socio-Cultural Anthropologist)
Sarah Sterling (Anthropological Archaeologist)
Natalie Vasey (Biological Anthropologist)

Accomplishments
The full-time faculty of the Anthropology Department met to discuss curricular cohesion across the graduate curriculum, focusing in particular on the graduate core seminars in socio-cultural anthropology (Anth 511), archaeology (Anth 550), and biological anthropology (Anth 570). During the meeting we reviewed recent syllabi from each of the cores and asked the instructors to speak about the material and topics covered. In particular, we focused on what students in and outside of the particular subfield got from and contribute to the courses.

All instructors explicitly addressed the subfields question with their students early in the quarter (e.g., different learning traditions across the subfields), often on the first day and/or in the syllabus. We discussed the possibility of including some readings or even a section in each core about the intersections between the subfields, particularly as these relate to issues of ethics and colonialism.

We also discussed at length how (or whether) the main assignment(s) allowed students in other subfields to explore a topic related to their primary area of interest and focus. For example, one archaeology instructor suggests that socio-cultural students write an archaeological paper about a world region on which they plan to focus. One socio-cultural instructor provides a syllabus section on environment and event ecology that is of particular interest for the archaeology and biological anthropology students. In the bio-anth core, students can focus on topics of their choice, provided they work within a biocultural framework. A request was made for additional bio-cultural material (e.g., health-related material, other material about living humans and adaptations in contemporary populations) in the bio-anth core for socio-cultural students; the instructor provided an additional list of reading materials after the meeting and explained where such materials fit into the course.

A number of themes arose that cross-cut the subfield syllabi. One theme was the importance of holding an explicit discussion about anthropological ethics in the core seminars. Often anthropological practitioners need information from other subfields in order to hold such discussions professionally. At the moment, the theme of ethics is covered implicitly but not explicitly in some of the core seminars; this is a situation that instructors may wish to change in future incarnations of the cores.
A second theme that cross-cut the subfields was the tension about whether to focus on historical background vs. contemporary theories and approaches. The faculty acknowledged the value of covering both the historical roots of the discipline and contemporary foci of research. They also noted the difficulty of covering both historical and contemporary materials in a 10-week course and considered how to balance those two priorities. The majority of the group felt that although understanding the past of the discipline is important and certainly connects to what anthropologists are doing in the present, in 10 weeks it is more important to get students thinking about contemporary issues, theorists, and materials rather than historical ones. A minority felt that past and present could be and were integrated without difficulty.

Discussion focused on pedagogical approaches. A third theme arose around the type of interactions expected in a seminar environment. One instructor deliberately put together students from different subfields to lead discussions and/or facilitate conversations about topics. Another instructor graded and gave students feedback on their class participation, providing explicit suggestions for how to interact at the graduate level.

In the core seminars, instructors use a variety of formal and informal writing assignments. A fourth theme, informal writing assignments, involved providing both ‘read and think’ as well as ‘do things’ exercises. We talked about the usefulness of reading journals and other short essays to assure that students had done the reading and were given the opportunity to summarize and analyze the material as well as offer critiques. (Everyone emphasized the importance of having students move beyond description into synthesis and analysis.) We talked about the possibility of having students craft their own questions for essays and discussions as a way to push them to synthesize.

A fifth theme involved various methods for scaffolding large, formal writing assignments (e.g., timelines for turning in research paper questions, annotated bibliographies, and draft essays). In light of the wish to make sure that students have experience putting together long, formal essays, we considered whether book reviews or biography assignments might better be replaced by research papers on contemporary theoretical issues that connect to students’ own graduate program interests. In all of these cases, we emphasized the importance of reading primary literature (both historical and contemporary) associated with the field.

At the end of the meeting, several faculty briefly discussed the possibility of offering one-credit seminars for graduate students during which we could address skills needed across the subfields, such as literature searches and literature reviews and graduate-level writing of research papers and proposals. These instructions could supplement the research seminars offered by the library. We also thought it might be interesting and useful to have the core faculty introduce themselves to the graduate students by give brief presentations of their work (perhaps also offering recent publications for students to review).

**Skills and Competencies**

We ran out of time to craft a full list of learning goals for our graduate students, but did sketch out a preliminary set of ideas. Our discussion focused on the graduate seminars, but the main idea was to think about student outcomes: things that we want to
be sure that our students understand and/or are able to do. Some suggested learning outcomes include:

1. Ethics – students should have a sophisticated understanding of anthropological ethics, bolstered by explicit instruction in every core seminar
2. Intersections (ethical and other) between the subfields should be discussed in the cores and understood by grad students
3. All grad students should be able to read primary sources and summarize, analyze, and critique them
4. Grad students should be able to craft research papers using and synthesizing primary sources
5. Students should have a good grasp of the contemporary scope of the discipline; historical material is interesting but less crucial
6. Communication: Grad students should understand how to behave in seminar courses. They should be able to lead discussions and give presentations. They should be able to write well and present and analyze quantitative materials.
7. Critical thinking: we did not explicitly address our criteria for graduate-level critical thinking. We should address this issue in the future.
8. Professional etiquette: we did not explicitly address our criteria for graduate-level professional etiquette. We should address this issue in the future.
9. Research design: we talked about putting together a one-credit course on research design and proposal writing. We did not explicitly address our criteria for evaluating students’ ability to design research projects and write research proposals. We should address these issues in the future.

Future Discussions
At our Fall Retreat, we will continue the discussion of graduate core courses and will work further on our learning goals for the graduate program.

We will also follow up on the idea of holding one-credit seminars for our graduate students, thinking how to staff these and work them into people’s teaching loads.