ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

Tenth Annual Portfolio Review
2:00-3:30 p.m. Cramer Hall 141
June 12, 2012
Michele Gamburd

PRESENT
Shelby Anderson, Assistant Professor (Archaeologist)
Virginia Butler, Professor (Archaeologist)
Michele Gamburd, Professor and Chair (Sociocultural Anthropologist)
Jeremy Spoon, Assistant Professor (Sociocultural Anthropologist)
Doug Wilson Adjunct, Associate Professor (Archaeologist)

ABSENT
Sharon Carstens, Professor (Sociocultural Anthropologist): In Malaysia for research and conference
Natalie Vasey, Associate Professor (Biological Anthropologist): On medical leave

ACCOMPLISHMENTS
I. Assessment of Course Portfolios using ‘Applications of Anthropology’ Rubric

The group reviewed course portfolios from Dr. Jeremy Spoon’s course in sociocultural anthropology ANTH 418: Environmental Anthropology and Dr. Shelby Anderson’s course ANTH 461: Advanced Topics in Archaeology – Environmental Approaches in Archaeology. Both of these elective classes deal with one of the department’s specialty areas, environmental anthropology. We focused our evaluation on the degree to which the courses met sub-goal II.3, which states

II. Applications of Anthropology. Students will understand how to apply anthropological methods in an ethical and effective fashion to research questions, issues, and debates.
   3. Students will understand the relevance of anthropology in and to contemporary public issues.

Outcomes:
- Materials from ANTH 418 included the course syllabus, assignment sheets for all of the course activities, and samples of student work; the instructor proved copies of the highest A, the lowest A, the lowest B, a C, and the lowest scoring paper.
  - Dr. Spoon described the trajectory of this 30-person class as outlined in the syllabus. He explained how readings and assignments encouraged students to consider classic and contemporary materials on environmental anthropology in light of current case studies. In addition, the graduate students in ANTH 518 organized for the class a service learning project in the Portland area on Native American Ethnobotany. This course clearly fulfills our goal II.3.
  - In reviewing the syllabus, the gathered faculty found that the readings were reasonable in number and appropriate in content. The faculty had an
animated and engaged discussion regarding benefits, challenges, and strategies related to Dr. Spoon’s reading journal assignment. We similarly discussed his use of the team-building strategy of forming permanent discussion groups with rotating facilitators and scribes. As a faculty, we considered the pros and cons of crafting extra credit assignments for students who attend extracurricular department events (e.g., First Thursday lectures and job talks).

- Review of the five sample papers showed that students had generally mastered the ability to take a problem-oriented approach to a contemporary human-environment issue while engaging with literature written in the past 10 years. Differences in grades reflected different skill levels and quality of execution of the assignment.

- Materials from ANTH 461 included the course syllabus, all course assignments, and copies of 7 student essays (the two papers tied for the highest A, the lowest A, the lowest B, a C, and the two papers tied for the lowest grade) for the assignment targeted to address this goal.
  - The course deals with human-environment interactions. Dr. Anderson talked about the 3-part structure of her syllabus, which begins with a section on methods, moves to a section on archaeological applications, and concludes with a section on applications to contemporary issues. This course clearly fulfills our goal II.3.
  - Dr. Anderson explained the set-up for the final project, a student presentation and an annotated bibliography on a class-related topic of the student’s choice. Dr. Anderson reported that the presentations were uniformly quite strong, but that the bibliographies revealed a range of student mastery. The faculty reviewed samples of this assignment. We agreed that the B paper showed a reasonable facility with the material.
  - The group spent some time discussing teaching strategies to motivate student discussions. In addition, we exchanged useful teaching tips regarding the quantity of readings and written work assigned in classes, the challenges of motivating graduate students to take on leadership roles in a 400-500 level course, and the difficulty in teaching undergraduates students to a) differentiate between summary and critique and b) synthesize course materials and create a conversation between readings.

II. Learning Goals and Scoring Rubrics

The group felt no need to update the Department’s Learning Goals. We decided that the two assessed courses fully met Learning Goal II.3, which we continue to feel represents one of the department’s highest priorities. In addition, we noted that several students who had taken both of the assessed courses had written exceptionally good papers, thus prompting us to observe that this year’s assessment materials also illustrate that students were meeting Learning Goal III.2: “Students will understand how and why the subfields of anthropology (i.e., sociocultural anthropology, anthropological archaeology, and biological anthropology) interrelate.” In the past, we had worried because we do not have a course that specifically addresses this issue; we depend on the structure of our major requirements to push students to take core and elective classes
across the subdisciplines. Materials assessed this year informally reveal the success of this strategy.

Because our conversation focused on teaching techniques, we did not spend a long time with the scoring rubric. For each course, we did agree that the instructor’s materials fulfilled the goal well and that the student work samples showed that our “average” students (with papers like the “lowest B” sample) had an adequate grasp of the concepts in question. We felt that the scoring rubric worked well and we had no suggestions for change.

Outcomes:

- The group felt that the current incarnation of our Learning Goals and scoring rubric work well; they do not require revision at this time.
- The group agreed to discuss next year’s assessment plan at the Fall Retreat.