Departmental Assessment Update  
Fall 2012 (For Academic Year 2011-12)  
Anthropology Department

For the academic year 2011-12, the anthropology department carried out four assessment projects, three indirect and one direct. First, the department continued to implement the indirect assessment of exit questionnaires for graduating seniors. The questionnaire addresses student perceptions of their completion of the anthropology department learning goals, given below. The students were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how well they thought they had achieved each goal. Second, a similar but simplified version of the senior questionnaire was given to the juniors and sophomores. Third, anthropology faculty mapped the department’s learning goals onto the courses they currently teach, as a way to evaluate the viability of the learning goals. Finally, the department carried out an indirect assessment project, based on the review of 20 senior anthropology papers written for 4 different 400-level courses in fall 2011. All the assessment tools and their results will be discussed below.

As a brief reminder, the current department learning goals are as follows:

1. understand how all the sub-fields—archaeology, biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, and linguistics—have been defined, fit together, clashed, challenged each other, and complemented each other through time;

2. articulate how the fundamental ideas in anthropology—of evolution, culture, structure, function, and relativism—have developed through time and always come back to address the essential question of what it means to be human;

3. analyze and articulate the importance of language in the life of humans through time, as biological species and as active participants in living cultures, as evidenced in their anthropological work and co-requisite study of a foreign language;

4. appreciate cross-cultural and inter-cultural difference as an inherent part of what it means to be human, through coursework preferably complemented experientially by participation in at least one overseas program;

5. engage in comparative work within and across all four sub-disciplines;

6. articulate and use important theoretical, methodological, and ethical issues in each of the four subfields with an eye toward distinguishing
cultural relativism from moral relativism in analyzing and understanding human behavior of all kinds, and of recognizing that in cultural anthropology and linguistics we are working with live human beings, with all the ethical responsibilities that entails;

7. demonstrate critical reading, thinking, writing and speaking skills;

8. master *American Anthropologist* citation conventions and other “nuts and bolts” issues of competency and ethics of scholarly reportage in anthropology;

9. distinguish and use critically many different kinds of sources, whether they be primary, secondary, or popular sources;

10. distinguish good scientific inquiry from bad, both in and outside of anthropology, using all of the aforementioned understandings and skills.

**1. INDIRECT ASSESSMENT PROJECT: 3rd Annual Senior Exit Survey**

The senior exit survey, which examines student perceptions of their achievement of the ten learning goals, was administered in spring 2012 to 21 graduating seniors. With a relatively large cohort this year, our hope is that we will be able to detect more useful patterns and insights which combined with the 2010 and 2011 data, will give the department strong information with which to work. Some patterns were similar to responses from previous years. For instance, the overwhelming number of responses were once again grouped in the ‘strongly agree’ and ‘somewhat agree’ end of the spectrum. Also, as was noted in the previous year, some students seemed unsure about the meaning/intent of learning goal #5, a sure sign that this goal must be reconsidered and re-phrased. Again, students used their responses to learning goals #2 and #6 to suggest that these goals were satisfied primarily in the senior year. Finally, some students indicated through learning goal #3 that linguistics did not get as much attention in terms of course availability as the other three sub-disciplines.

Some new issues came to light with this year’s exit survey. One concern was the observation that several students felt that they had not mastered the AAA citation style completely (this was a response that received a few ‘not sure’ and ‘somewhat disagree’ responses.)
2. INDIRECT ASSESSMENT PROJECT: 1st Annual Sophomore/Junior Survey

Realizing that assessment involves more than the evaluation of senior performance and perceptions, the anthropology decided this year to institute a new annual survey tool, this time to measure perceptions of sophomore and junior majors of ongoing progress in attaining the ten learning goals. A questionnaire similar to the senior exit survey was given to all non-senior declared majors, and was completed anonymously. This year, ten complete questionnaires were returned. Like the seniors, most of the responses in the upper ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ categories, which suggests that even with our 100-, 200-, and 300-level courses we are pretty successful, when using the learning goals as the barometer, in introducing and teaching our underclass students to key anthropology concepts, principles, and strategies. The lower responses were also informative: not surprisingly, these students felt less sure about having mastered learning goals #2 and #6, which are emphasized in 400-level courses, and sometimes learning goal #3, which reflects the department’s current challenges with regard to be able to offer enough linguistic anthropology courses in the past two years.

3. INDIRECT ASSESSMENT PROJECT: Mapping Learning Goals onto Existing Anthropology Courses

This year the department also created a spreadsheet wherein the three current faculty members mapped the department learning goals onto the courses in the department. Several interesting patterns emerged from this process. By far the most learning goals were ‘strongly’ or ‘moderately’ in the 400-level courses, which is not surprising. For the 300-level courses, learning goals #4 and #5 tended to be most emphasized, followed by learning goals #2 and #7. The 100-level and 200-level anthropology courses demonstrated a tendency to focus on learning goals #2, #4, and #5. What is clear is, again, that linguistic anthropological principles have in the last two years been under-emphasized (a function of the loss of courses by Dr.
Pomponio, whose specialty is linguistics but whose illness prevented the department from offering our usual roster of linguistic courses).

4. DIRECT ASSESSMENT PROJECT: Assessing Learning Goal #4 via the Evaluation of Twenty Senior Writing Projects

For this year, the department decided to focus attention more closely on a learning goal which we looked at a few years ago: #4, “appreciate cross-cultural and inter-cultural difference as an inherent part of what it means to be human, through coursework preferably complemented experientially by participation in at least one overseas program”. This learning goal was addressed in 2008, in part through the measurement of the number of anthropology majors who enrolled in at least one overseas program, or participated in some other off-campus cultural experience (such as a field school or research travel component) while at SLU. Here the focus is on the extent to which students demonstrate one of the key elements of anthropology training: the ability to engage sensitively and non-ethnocentrically as they investigate cultural, historical, and social conditions different from their own experiences. We envision this learning goal as the ability of the student to analyze socio-cultural and historical circumstances in a way that demonstrates their understanding and appreciation of human diversity in all its form – biologically, culturally, linguistically, historically, etc.

To assess learning goal #4, we had originally designed a 5-point scale along 4 dimensions (Overall Approach, Curiosity, Ethnocentrism, and Treatment of Data/Theory), where ‘1’ indicates a complete lack of cross-cultural understanding, and ‘5’ demonstrates a significant appreciation of and skills in investigating cross-cultural variation. After Dr. Pitre’s participation in the June 2012 Assessment Workshop, we applied some of the principles she learned and modified the scale for enhance simplicity and reduce redundancy. The new rubric, shown here, follows the 3-point scale developed in the workshop, where 1= little or no mastery, 2 = shows some mastery, and 3 = shows significant mastery.
The two faculty members on campus in spring 2012, Drs. Abraham and Pitre, reviewed copies of 20 research papers written by seniors in fall 2011 in Anth 415, Anth 425, Anth 445, and Anth 489. Each paper was evaluated with 3 scores of 1, 2, or 3 with reference to three issues: the student's broad approach to cross-cultural analysis, the awareness of the risks of ethnocentrism, and treatment of data and theory. The responses for each issue were then averaged for each reviewer:

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<th></th>
<th>a</th>
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<tr>
<td>Abraham</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>2.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pitre</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.85</td>
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<td>(Averaged)</td>
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Although only two faculty took part in this direct assessment project, it is noteworthy how close the evaluation scores were, especially for issues ‘a’ and ‘b’ (something that was also noted during the Teagle workshop). Central to the study of anthropology is the acknowledgment, appreciation, and investigation of human and cultural diversity. As such, the evaluation here of goal #4 suggests that, in the main, the anthropology students are making a concerted effort in their research.
projects to investigate issues of variability and to adopt a perspective that indicates awareness of positionality and is explicitly non-ethnocentric. The students scored credibly in terms of their attention to how selecting and evaluating data must be done, explicitly or otherwise, in the context of some theoretical model, but one can argue that this is an aspect of studying biological and cultural variability that could emphasized even more in our anthropology classes. What this assessment demonstrates, and something also concluded from the summer workshop, is that as we move forward we can discuss how to make consistent and clarify our expectations of our students. For example, one possibility, as we re-evaluate the anthropology curriculum, is to require students to take the theory course in the ‘middle’ of his/her academic trajectory – as juniors or even as sophomores. Making this kind of change may ensure that students are more clearly trained in how to understand and explain their own theoretical stances as they assess data within the field.

**Conclusion**

In general, the results of all the assessment tools have been helpful, especially in reiterating a common thought among the current faculty that the time has come to re-think and ‘update’ the learning goals. The results of the three indirect assessment tools suggest that the learning goals, as currently defined, functioned very well with the earlier generation of faculty, but may reflect more a late 20th century model of anthropology, rather than the realities of 21st century anthropology, at the undergraduate level. The results of the direct assessment of senior research papers demonstrate that our anthropology majors are comfortable with the practice of analyzing inter- and cross-cultural variability and with understanding the importance of avoiding ethnocentric and self-centered views of the other. They also suggest that the time has come to assess certain elements of the anthropology curriculum, and to track more carefully how learning accumulates and advances over four years – in this case, with regard to when students are first exposed to anthropological theory. Both the indirect and direct assessment indicate
the benefit of being more proactive and consistent about introducing our majors early on to the key theoretical concepts that guide and have guided anthropological inquiry, so that their immersion in these concepts as seniors is built on a sturdier foundation.