Undergraduate Program Assessment

Department of Anthropology

Student Learning Objectives

- Gain an appreciation of who we are, as humans, within the context of our evolutionary past.
- Gain an understanding of the causes and function of human biological and cultural variation in the past and present.
- Recognize the dynamic and changing nature of individuals, societies, and populations.
- Better understand how individuals and their communities are shaped by economic and political institutions beyond them including colonialism, structures of inequality, globalization, race, gender, class and sexuality.
- Be able to articulate how evolution works within the contexts of developmental and population biology, including the processes of natural selection, mutation, genetic drift and gene flow.
- Become familiar with the theories and methods (technical, analytic, qualitative and quantitative) through which we understand the full range of human behavior.
- Gain appreciation of the variable and systematic ways human beings have of organizing culturally meaningful lives.
- Develop skills in critical thinking about biological diversity, social and cultural diversity and inequality.
- Understand the basic premises of ethically responsible research.
- Gain experience in conducting anthropological research.
- Develop advanced skills in effective communication – written and oral - about human culture, society and biology. These skills will be of benefit to any professional career.
- Develop self-reflexivity and other skills relevant to problem solving and social activism.

Assessment tools

- Directly engage with a revived Undergraduate Caucus to enhance student feedback supporting program assessment.
- Through one-to-one discussions with students during the advising period, the undergraduate program director and chief undergraduate advisor seek input on several questions, including: how the curriculum is meeting student needs; which of the learning objectives are effectively met and which ones less so; what might improve the advising process; and, what other actions might the department take to improve student experience.
- The Undergraduate Program Director and Chief Undergraduate advisor summarize and synthesize results from discussions with students and present these at faculty caucus for discussion and corroboration based on faculty experience.
Assessment Results

- From the student’s perspective the department’s curriculum and the quality of classes and instructors meet most or all learning objectives. Students identified several areas in which they would like to see changes or improvement. These included:

  1) Greater predictability of course scheduling in order to plan coursework several years out;
  2) More “hands on” experience in or out of the classroom;
  3) More opportunities to engage in research, including field research and research/learning opportunities in other cultures;
  4) Better consistency in the advisement process.

- Several of the “highlighted recent activities” below were implemented to address these concerns.

Highlighted recent activities

- The Chief academic advisor is working with faculty to move a backlog of courses from “experimental” status to permanent (“regularized”) status. This will enhance student’s ability to use SPIRE to review course content and requirements it fulfills, plan schedules, and track their path towards meeting requirements of the major. Currently, courses listed as a “397 special topics” have limited descriptions and no designation of how they fulfill major requirements.

- We have implemented a 2-year schedule of courses (updated each semester) and a 3-year draft curricular plan. This is designed to meet student needs for greater predictability in planning their coursework for the major.

- Two years ago the department initiated a new advising process where advising duties are split between the UPD and Chief Undergraduate Advisor. This was designed to make advising more efficient and effective given an increasing number of majors, and increasing number of new university requirements, and an increasing number of new faculty in the department unfamiliar to the undergraduate advising process. The system has proven to improve the consistency and quality of the advising process.

- In order to meet student desire for more hands on training, a key learning mission, we instituted set “doing course” requirements as part of the major. These are courses that include a laboratory component, internship, and/or data analysis and presentation as a key feature of the class.

- In AY 2012-13 the department initiated a program of scholarships to help undergraduates participate in field schools, study abroad opportunities, and/or otherwise gain direct experience in and with other cultures.
Future Plans

- In AY 2013-14 the department plans a series of meetings to specifically address undergraduate curricular issues. This will take the form of a retreat or series of scheduled meetings to address:

  1) Program structure and requirements;
  2) Program curriculum and specific course offerings and schedules;
  3) Completing the major in a 4-year and 3-year time frame;
  4) Providing all students with the opportunity to conduct anthropological research in various contexts.

- Design a new electronic survey of undergraduate majors in order to assess the impact of recent changes in the structure of the undergraduate program.