

Anthropology, Master of Arts

College of Liberal Arts

AY 2016-2017

AY 2017-2018

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The Anthropology Department faculty met to discuss program assessment and consider changes in the curriculum on September 20, 2013 and implemented a new MA program SLOA plan. This is the first MA SLOA review summary that encompasses entirely the new protocols (see below). The next meeting is scheduled for November 2018. During the review period, eight (8) MA students finished their comprehensive exams or defended their thesis proposals. In addition, six students completed their MA studies.

1. Assessment information collected

This table shows the measures, outcomes and data collected for the learning objectives identified in the 2013 protocol.

2013 Protocol objectives	Assessment measures and learning outcomes	Information collected
1. Students will be able to demonstrate expertise in their chosen subfield of anthropology.	1.1 Of the 21 credits of 600-level coursework required for a MA degree, three of these must be a core class in their subfield.	At the end of the semester, the instructor of record of the core course will use a rubric (in development) to evaluate each student's knowledge of the subfield.
	1.2 Comprehensive exams, administered at the end of the fall semester of a student's second year of study, evaluate knowledge of the primary debates within, history of and research findings in their subfield and chosen field area or geographic region. Comprehensive exam questions will be evaluated in advance by the Graduate Program Coordinator to determine whether they are sufficiently general.	After the completion of the exam, the advisory committee will evaluate the student's performance following a rubric (to be developed).

	1.3 Master's theses demonstrate students' mastery of a specific topic of inquiry within their subfield.	The student's advisory committee will not allow the student to schedule a defense until the committee is satisfied that the student's thesis demonstrates mastery of their topic
2. Students will be fluent in the research methodologies associated with their subfield and will be able to apply them to their own research	2.1 Students will be required to take at least one methods- or theoretical-focused class related to their subfield and projected area of emphasis for their Master's thesis.	Methods courses will cover a broad range of methodologies and assignments will be graded by the instructor of record. The evaluation rubric for student theses will include assessment of the application of methods and research design. This rubric will be completed by the student's advisory committee as a whole.
3. Students will have a general knowledge of the four fields of anthropology, including its history as a scholarly discipline	3.1 3 of the 15 credits of 600-level coursework will be comprised of a course on the history of anthropology	The instructor of record will complete a rubric (under development) assessing each student's knowledge of each field
4. Students will be flexible thinkers and able to draw synthetic connections between their subfield and at least one of the others.	4.1 Students will be required to take at least one class outside of their subfield 4.2 Master's theses will engage with or be informed by literature, methodology or theoretical insights from at least one of the other subfields	Their grade reflects their performance in the class The advisory committee will fill out a rubric (under development) evaluating the student's ability to draw in knowledge from beyond his or her knowledge
5. Students will be able to develop original research and present it in a variety of public and scholarly settings.	5.1 Students receive training in writing conference abstracts in ANTH F652: Research Design and Professional Development, one of the required courses for the MA. 5.2 Master's theses and seminar papers provide opportunities for students to develop original research. 5.3 The thesis defense gives students the opportunity to present their original research to the public.	The instructor of ANTH F652: Research Design and Professional Development grades students' sample research abstracts. The rubric under development will evaluate theses for their originality and rigor. After the defense, the advisory committee will evaluate the defense based on the student's oral presentation and argumentation skills
6. Students will be fluent in writing grant proposals and research reports.	6.1 Students are required to write sample grant proposals and research reports in ANTH F652: Research Design and Professional Development.	The instructor of record evaluates these assignments as part of the student's grade in the course.

7. Students will be prepared to enter professional careers or apply to continue their graduate training	7.1 Writing a thesis and completing ANTH F652 prepares students to describe a prospective research problem, which translates directly into a graduate or professional school admissions essay or fellowship application. Students receive practice writing cover letters and preparing cover letters in ANTH F652.	The instructor of record evaluates these assignments as part of the student's grade in the course. The department will collect information on whether students were admitted to PhD programs or obtained employment in anthropology or related fields after graduation.
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The data collected for the MA program:

OBJECTIVES 1-3--HISTORY AND THEORY. We believe the required course ANTH 629: Structures of Anthropological Argument has worked well to address issues surrounding the historical development of anthropology as an academic discipline as well as the dynamism in theoretical perspectives offered by this academic discipline. From its very inception, anthropology has prided itself on the tremendous intellectual breadth of scope brought to bear on scientific examinations of the human condition. Needless to say, these efforts have witnessed tremendous changes in perspectives influenced both from within and from outside the discipline. Given the holistic perspective of anthropology, any attempt to synthesize the historical development of this discipline, as well as the theoretical underpinnings that ground it, represents a formidable task.

As mentioned in the review submitted in October of 2013, we surveyed faculty about students who entered the program over the 2-year review period. All but one of these students was reported by the faculty to have achieved satisfactory or exceptional learning results in classes. Eight students completed their MA comprehensive examinations. The results indicate that most of the students experienced some difficulties in completing their comprehensive examinations satisfactorily upon their initial attempts. However, there were several exceptions in which no revisions were required by the examining committee. Nevertheless, it was the history and theory component of the comprehensive exams that continued to be most challenging for our MA-level students.

OBJECTIVE 4--SPECIAL RESEARCH SKILLS. As stated in our assessment of the PhD SLOAs, half of the 2012 PhD-supervising-faculty (a statistically unreliable n=2 out of 4) responded to questions about the effectiveness of the language and methods tool as follows: 1) For archaeology and biological anthropology students the research tool was considered essential and usually completed early in the Graduate Plan of Study; 2) For SocLing (sociocultural and linguistic anthropology) students the language tool is usually used to gain some familiarity with a field language. A plurality of sociocultural students is of non-US origin and hence some come with proficiency in a scholarly language (usually Russian) appropriate for their research or their future scholarly career. This, however, is not the case for indigenous languages of the peoples of Alaska, northern Canada, or eastern Siberia. Consequently, SocLing students whose research interests lie with the indigenous peoples of Alaska, northern Canada and eastern Siberia are encouraged to address their language deficiencies early in their doctoral studies. We are finding that students tend to do well in those special research skills courses the students perceive as most closely related to their specific thesis topics, but they do less well in those that are perceived to

be more tangential. For those on the BioArch side, courses in Global Information Systems (GIS), Faunal Analysis, and Lithic Analysis appear to be more easily assimilated than the broader based than the more indirectly applied course on analytical Techniques. On the SocLing side the same pattern holds true with performance somewhat higher in the application-proximate Qualitative Analysis course than in the language courses.

OBJECTIVE 5--PROPOSAL AND REPORT WRITING. All recent MA students have been required to enroll in and successfully complete ANTH F652: Research Design and Professional Development. This course involves development of a research proposal and discussions of research strategies and ethics. The deliverable outcome at the end of this course is a research proposal that is evaluated by both the instructor and the student's advisory committee. Data collection on the sophistication and funding success student grants is, as yet, incomplete.

OBJECTIVE 6--TEACHING EXPERIENCE AND PREPARATION. The department has a mandatory annual, if brief TA, training meeting. Faculty reported working with students on an individual basis with varying levels of satisfaction of their TA's professionalism and preparedness.

2. Conclusions drawn from the information summarized above.

OBJECTIVE 1. The faculty continues to believe that the current system of a Master's level comprehensive examination featuring three areas of emphasis and a thesis proposal defense has served the students well and currently stands as the best tool for assessment of doctoral-level learning in the program. The comprehensive examination foci exhibit the student's ability to synthesize complex theory and data and write about the synthesis in a clear manner. Students simultaneously demonstrate their learning and learn from the process. The responses are evaluated by the advisory committee and must be satisfactory before the student can continue towards completion of the degree. The new assessment plan includes a rubric for evaluating the learning outcomes of this component of the program. During the previous review we discussed the possible requirement of a methods course for all MA students. This would help to insure that students: 1) have a better chance to receive research funding, 2) conduct more thorough and efficient research; and 3) have a clear path from research to write-up. Over the current review period we straddled between two approaches. The first was to continue requiring the course ANTH F652: Research Design and Professional Development. This course addressed the three goals identified in the previous sentence, but did not address topic-specific methods unique to individual student projects. As in previous years, we decided to leave this requirement to the students' committees. This approach appears to have worked with students taking methods-specific courses, either within the department curriculum, or in the curricula offered by other degree programs at UAF.

OBJECTIVE 2. During the previous review the question of reinstituting proseminars, with each representing one of the four subfields, was raised in connection with the MA program. Such a structural change in the Master's program would have a significant, and we believe positive, impact on course offerings for doctoral students. No decision was made at that time on requiring these classes at the MA level, leaving the default to be that requiring the proseminars would be up to the advisory committees. None of these proseminars was offered during the last two academic years. After another two years of reflection we are becoming increasingly convinced

that the subdisciplinary proseminars ought to be reinstituted at the Master's level and that any deficiencies found in the academic records of matriculating doctoral students—especially those from Master's programs other than UAF—must be addressed in the student's Graduate Plan of Study. The key issue with regard to the proseminars is how many ought to be required.

OBJECTIVE 3. No changes were recommended in the flexible thinking and ability to draw synthetic connection between subdisciplines objective during the last review. However, over the course of the last two academic years we have seen a continuing trend towards ever more insular thinking by disciplinary concentration creep into our graduate program. We recommend three proseminars as appropriate, for this would: 1) demand that students take a proseminar outside of their BioArch or SocLing concentration, 2) build flexibility for student choice with regard to this requirement, while 3) avoiding the inescapable superficiality of attempting to encompass the “general knowledge of the four fields of anthropology” into a single semester course.

OBJECTIVES 4-5. The faculty is in general agreement that the required course ANTH F652: Research Design and Professional Development has served the students well. The required course has led to more student confidence in the planning and carrying out of research, which has led, in turn, to the more efficient completion of theses and dissertations. Questions were raised about whether students could use more specific training in research methods in each subdiscipline and whether methodology courses currently being offered should be required in students' subfields. This, again, was left to the discretion of the advisory committee (see Objective 2 above).

OBJECTIVE 6. All MA students during the course of the current review served as teaching assistants in one or more courses. As a result, these students have received instruction and practice in the development of professional lectures, presentations, and student performance assessment. Our MA students have been encouraged to present the results of their own research at in-house, regional, and national meetings. Our assessment plan calls for annual administration of an exit survey and an alumni survey to collect data on student and alumni employment, publications, grant proposals and their overall satisfaction with the training provided by the program. We have been remiss in conducting this annual survey to date.

3. Suggestions for curricular improvements resulting from conclusions drawn above.

OBJECTIVES 1-3--HISTORY AND THEORY. We believe the required course ANTH F629: Structures of Anthropological Argument has worked well to address issues surrounding the historical development of anthropology as an academic discipline as well as the dynamism in theoretical perspectives offered by this academic discipline. The relative subdisciplinary emphasis given in this course depends upon the instructor of record, but throughout the review period, this focus has been on sociocultural anthropology. This has served our graduate students well as sociocultural anthropology represents the largest subdiscipline by numerical strength of its practitioners, and the theory behind it remains at the center of anthropological inquiry *regardless of subdisciplinary emphasis*. The faculty believes the current approach is working reasonably well and sees no need for fundamental changes at this time. Nevertheless,

reintroduction of a required three subdisciplinary-based series of proseminars offers the benefit of providing additional grounding in subdisciplinary-specific historical development and theoretical dynamism.

OBJECTIVES 4-5—PRESENTATION AND DELIVERY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS. As noted with regard to Objective 2 above, we believe ANTH F652: Research Design and Professional Development has worked well to address issues surrounding our MA students' ability to secure research funding, increase the thoroughness and efficiency of their research efforts, and to present those results in both oral and written form. Nevertheless, we are cognizant that this course cannot—and should not—address all of the skills and experience needed for students to present and deliver the results of their research in both written and oral form to the larger academic and public communities. To that end, we encourage our students to present the results of their research efforts at regional meetings.

OBJECTIVE 6—PREPARATION FOR PROFESSIONAL CAREERS. We believe two changes are necessary to prepare our students for professional careers upon graduation more comprehensively. The first involves the reinstatement of at least three discipline-specific proseminars for all graduate students. We believe this change offers three benefits: 1) It establishes a professional cohort among graduate students that will facilitate networking far beyond their graduate careers and carry over into their continuing professional development after graduation, 2) It builds a multidisciplinary perspective on the human condition that fosters the interdisciplinary thinking and cooperation that has become the reigning paradigm among the major granting agencies today (NSF, NIH) and will serve our students well as they seek financial support to continue their research efforts long after graduation; and 3) Serves a practical tactic in today's highly competitive job market. The fact of the matter is that traditional academic careers are now and will continue to be a shrinking proportion of the career opportunities in anthropology. Graduates whose skill sets encompass multiple subdisciplines will find their applications more attractive for employment at junior colleges, corporations, and government agencies than applicants whose skills sets—while highly developed—are narrowly focused within a single anthropological subdiscipline.

As noted above, we have been remiss in administering exit interviews and follow-up alumni surveys. We propose that each year during their annual review MA students supply a current copy of their curriculum vitae along with their review narrative. We believe that the irregular adherence to completing the comprehensive exam and prospectus defense assessment instruments is likely due to temporal lag in completion of the assessment instrument and the disconnect between the document flows (i.e., the Provost's official records of completion and the Departmental level assessment instruments). To rectify this, we recommend that a coupled Provost approved completion form and the Departmental level assessment instruments are administered simultaneously for each event (comprehensive exam completion and prospectus defense)

Graduate Studies Program coordinator Brian Hemphill and Department Chair Ben Potter met to summarize the 2016-2018 results and make the recommendations for the general faculty meeting to be held in November 2018.

Post-Graduation Activities:

Forensic Investigator, Travis County Medical Examiner's Office, Austin, TX (Since May 2017)

PhD student at John Moore University in Liverpool, UK.

Geologist/volcanologist at the Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys, Fairbanks.

Researcher at UA Museum of the North, and has worked for the National Park Service.

Archaeologist working for Northern Land Use Research, a cultural resource management firm, and for other CRM firms.