

Assessment Findings and Curricular Improvements
Department of Anthropology
Master's Program in Anthropology
PhD Program in Anthropology

Assessment Measures

The Department of Anthropology uses the following measures to assess departmental learning outcomes:

- Grades and enrollments
- Comprehensive examination
- Progression through the programs, April Audit
- Other

Assessment Findings

Historical Analysis and Methodology Discussion (Attachments 1-3):

This five-year reporting period of AY 2002-03 through AY 2006-07 overlaps a major change, reorientation, and study of our graduate program. At the beginning, the Anthropology Department had ceased accepting students for the PhD and has since matriculated graduate students only for the MA. Since then, twelve PhD students admitted before admissions were closed and six MAs, two of whom were admitted for the MA only, have completed degrees. Four other MA students chose not to continue for the PhD. Between Spring 2003 and Fall 2007, four students enrolled for the terminal MA program, two of whom graduated, and two more are on course. Remaining “legacy” PhD students are currently writing dissertations, except for two who have completed coursework, passed comprehensive examinations, and have approved projects for the PhD, but have taken leaves in the dissertation-writing stage for family reasons.

Over this period, we have continually discussed our MA program, which previously was a “stepping stone” to the PhD and, in the CUA fashion, culminated in a thesis earned in course as qualification for further study. CPIT-provided data on MA comprehensive exam results over this period (Attachment 1) have too few data points for meaningful comparison and include both students enrolled earlier with intentions to continue for the PhD and students enrolled over this period for the MA only. The more meaningful measure and concern for us has been length of times to completion, which ranged from three to as much as nine years for a MA. Most such students were in fact employed professionally as anthropologists and had completed course work requirements; lack of funding to continue full-time study negatively impacted completion of the MA. Externally, they could find work in the field, while the University could not provide financial support their studies. As a programmatic matter, we found that such students often specialized too early, partly in anticipation of eventual PhD projects, which for students already employed negatively impacted incentive to complete an intermediate Masters degree. Students with financing in place have completed their degrees at appropriate paces – two years for full-time MA students and four in the case of a Catholic high school teacher who was a half-time

student for four years and now offers the only anthropology course in the area for high school students.

Reviews of other Anthropology programs, including nearby competitors in other universities of the Washington Consortium, and input from current students and applicants over the past 5 years confirmed these features of the pre-PhD MA students and led us to a series of revisions. Earlier students, who typically found employment as anthropologists in research and service positions, were specializing too early in anticipation of continuing for the PhD. This reduced the incentive to finish a thesis, except as qualification for continuing to the PhD. In 2002, we added a non-thesis option (NTO) of writing a research report in a professional format as an alternative to the conventional university thesis, which no longer served as a “trial run” for a dissertation, and to bring training at the MA level more in line with what would be the professional practice of graduates.

Our more relevant measure for the stand-alone MA program is completion of pair of new gateway courses instituted for MA students in AY 2005-06 on Core Perspectives (ANTH 600, see Attachment 2) and Research Design & Conduct (ANTH 601, see Attachment 3). These are required in the first year, explicitly as core courses and to provide common and standard bases for further study, which proceeds to topical courses and culminates in comprehensive examinations and a thesis or NTO as appropriate to individual students’ post-graduation goals. This replaces continuous training and more problematic determinations of when individual students are “ready” for comprehensive exams. In AY 2007-08, after the failure of a student who took comps prematurely, we formalized an annual review of student progress conducted by the whole faculty to provide a regular intermediate assessment point when problematic preparations can be identified. Consolidating these measures, our MA program now can be routinely completed in two years (see below, Curricular Improvements for the Master’s Program).

Master’s Comprehensive Exams and Progression (Attachment 1):

Numbers of students taking MA comprehensive exams over this period are too small for meaningful comparison. They include students who enrolled earlier with intentions of continuing for the PhD and only four who matriculated for the MA only. Although technically a separate matriculation by University rules, it was the PhD that brought students into the earlier MA program; and they tended to regard the stages at least conceptually as continuous. All such students passed MA comps on first tries during this period, as did all MA-only students but one, who subsequently passed upon retaking the exam. Current MA students have completed the new core courses, had intermediate reviews (in Spring 2008) and are in final stages of completing their degrees.

Curricular Improvements for Master’s Program

Following termination of admissions for the PhD, we began a multi-year review of our MA offerings, trends in applicants, and program developments in other graduate Anthropology Departments. It has typically been the case that MA degrees in Anthropology are earned in course by students matriculated for PhDs, although few retain the tradition of a formal MA thesis that has been a CU standard and feature of this Department’s graduate program since the 1930s. Nationwide, more departments are offering vocationally-tied, stand-alone Masters degree

programs; locally, Anthropology departments at two other Consortium universities do so. To design a program that would allow for developing, and advertising, such options – examples we have considered are applied medical anthropology, cultural heritage management, global development, public policy – we repurposed our MA for upgrading skills and credentials, supplementing previous professional training (such as in education, health, social work, library science, international development), or exploring capacity for further graduate work. This is made explicit on the Department’s website.

Our MA is structured around four components: core perspectives and contemporary theory, research methods and conduct, research subfields represented by current faculty, and regional studies in which different topics typically are brought together around issues also addressed in other disciplines. These represent basic skills that anthropologists deploy. Students take a comprehensive examination in these four areas and, after 24 hours of coursework, have the option of writing a formal thesis or a professional-quality research paper following an appropriate format such as a journal article or a research report.

ANTH 600 (Core Perspectives) and ANTH 601 (Research Design & Conduct) function as gateway courses required for all graduate students in their first year. These courses and student performance are continuously reviewed, most formally in an annual Spring audit of student progress. So far, only minor changes have been made to the courses, which have been in place for three academic years and, we believe, are functioning to prepare students for the remainder of their work.

Advisors assigned to graduate students upon matriculation are responsible for the progress of individual students. The first composite level of review is an annual audit of all graduate students’ progress conducted by the whole faculty prior to pre-registration in Spring for the Fall semester. Second is the comprehensive examination covering the four parts of our program which are nearly universal among graduate programs in anthropology. For preparing a thesis or the non-thesis option, each student has a supervisor and a reader. For purposes of program review, the annual audit and comprehensive exams provide the most direct input to curricular improvement.

Finally, instruction of graduate students now takes the form of tutorials that supplement lecture courses. All of our courses are individually designed by faculty and incorporate their on-going research; tutorials for MA students emphasize research methods and literature in those areas, on which the substantive material (or findings) featured in lecture courses are based. We feel that graduate students need to command research literature and methods in order to make professional use of their training whether for research, service, teaching, or in further training either in anthropology or in another field.

These programmatic and curricular revisions have been driven by two concerns, timely completion and coherence for an MA program. When the MA was earned in course as a stepping-stone and qualification for matriculating for the PhD, completing the MA in two years was of less concern than supporting specialized study. Externally limiting factors have been shrinking faculty and support for students. For a stand-alone MA, it is of more concern. Fewer students apply for such programs in Anthropology nationally than in the Washington market, and the trend in our applications reflects preferences for goal-oriented degrees. The variable that we cannot affect is lack of financial support for MA studies, and acceptances by qualified students have declined specifically for this reason. Those students who bring support from a job or veterans’ benefits have been able to progress at the ideal pace, as have those supported by teaching assistantships recently. Others have not, some interrupting their studies, in the past

going to part-time status after the first year or even first semester; so we have to discourage students otherwise qualified by preparation and interest whom we cannot support financially or who do not bring their own financing.

Attachment 1: Comprehensive Exam Results

Attachment 2: ANTH 600 Summary Data

Attachment 3: ANTH 601 Summary Data

Attachment 1

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Institutional Assessment

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION RESULTS
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES: DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
AY2002-2003 to AY2006-2007

	Fail		Pass		High Pass		Pass w/Honors		TOTAL
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
AY2002-2003		0.00%	1	100.00%		0.00%		0.00%	1
AY2003-2004		0.00%	1	100.00%		0.00%		0.00%	1
AY2004-2005		0.00%	4	100.00%		0.00%		0.00%	4
AY2005-2006									
AY2006-2007									
TOTAL	0	0.00%	6	100.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	6

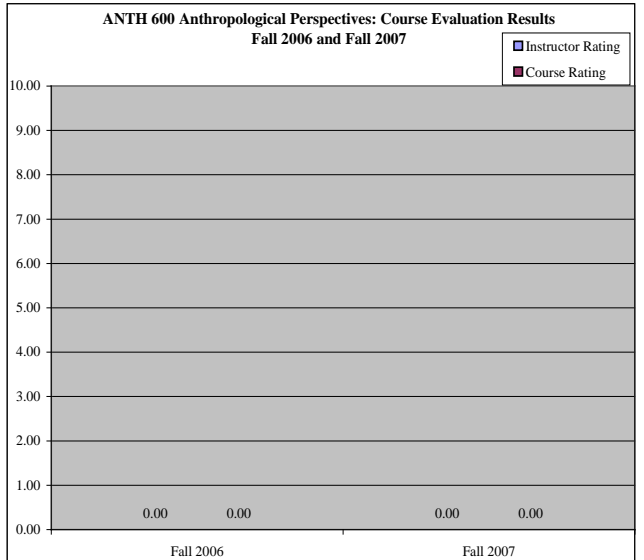
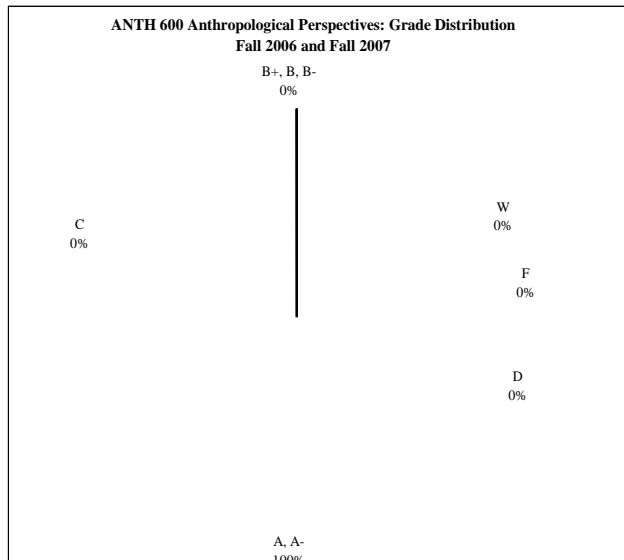
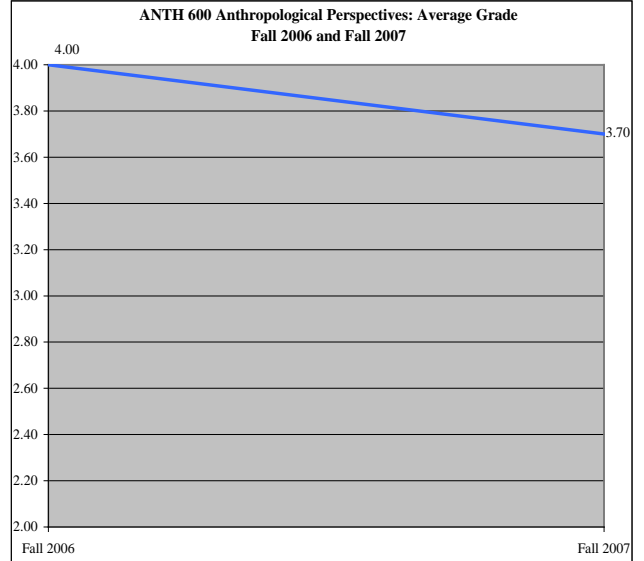
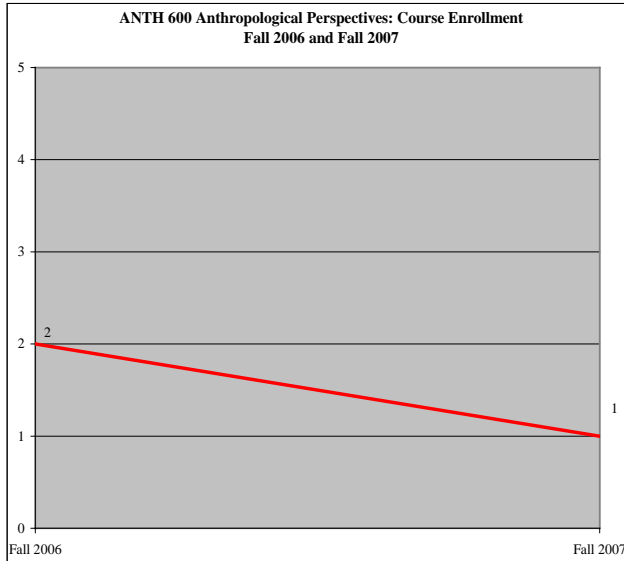
Note: Students were included in the categories High Pass and Pass with Honors if these designations were explicitly indicated within the student's milestone record. Please contact the Office of Institutional Assessment if this data can also be determined through the student's final grade in the comprehensive requirement.

Attachment 2

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COURSE SUMMARY DATA: DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
ANTH 600 Anthropological Perspectives

Term	Course Enrollment	Course Grade		Course Grades Grade Distribution							Course Evaluation Results					
		Avg.	StDev.	A, A-	B+, B, B-	C	D	F	W	Course Eval. #	Course Eval. %	Instructor Rating Avg.	Instructor Rating StDev.	Course Rating Avg.	Course Rating StDev.	
Fall 2006	2	4.00	0.00		2											
Fall 2007	1	3.70			1											



Attachment 3

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
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COURSE SUMMARY DATA: DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY ANTH 601 Research Design and Conduct

Term	Course Enrollment	Course Grade		Course Grades						Course Evaluation Results						
		Avg.	StDev.	A, A-	B+, B, B-	C	D	F	W	Course Eval. #	Course Eval. %	Instructor Rating Avg.	Instructor Rating StDev.	Course Rating Avg.	Course Rating StDev.	
Spring 2006	1	4.00		1								0.00%				
Spring 2007	1	3.00			1							0.00%				
Spring 2008	2	4.00	0.00	2								0.00%				

