

**Assessment Report for Sociology major, including Criminology option**  
**Assessment Report for Sociology minor**  
**Assessment Report for Anthropology major and minor**

**September 14, 2015**

**SOCI 499 – Senior Thesis Capstone**  
**Instructor: Colter Ellis**

**Assessment by: Cody Warner and David Eitle**  
**Learning Outcomes: Written Communication**

SOCI 499 is an upper division sociology course whose stated learning objectives are: (1) think about and apply what you have learned in Sociology to study a specific topic of interest to you from a sociological perspective; (2) develop a theoretically informed sociological research question; (3) situate the research question in the relevant literature; (4) find relevant data to the research question and empirically examine the data; (5) produce a research paper project; and (6) present the paper/proposal to faculty and peers in a poster session to be held at the end of the semester.

We randomly selected 9 papers to evaluate in relation to the learning objective of *written communication*. As per the program learning outcomes, written communication is defined as: “Our students will demonstrate appropriate writing practices and formats and effective written communication and editing skills.” Three A papers, three B papers, and three C papers were selected for the assessment. According to the assignment, students had to do write a final paper that outlined the major concerns and possible benefits of allowing oil and gas development in a hypothetical county. This involved writing an introduction, conducting a literature review, applying the literature to actual events, and giving policy recommendations. All aspects of the paper were assessed in relation to the learning outcome.

We constructed the scoring rubric (attached) independent of the paper assignment itself, since the purpose of the assessment is to determine whether learning outcomes are being met. We defined two elements of successful sociological writing (motivation of topic, and review of literature) and two elements of successful writing more generally (structure and grammar). Nonetheless, it is an important caveat to note that the goals of the paper assignment need not be consistent with the assessment of this particular learning outcome.

**‘A’ papers:**

As a group, the ‘A’ papers clearly excelled in written communication. The papers especially excelled in structure/organization and grammar/punctuation. The papers were easy to follow and contained few (if any) grammatical errors. Appropriate and consistent headings were used throughout to provide a clear structure to these papers. A few of these papers could have provided a stronger “road map” to the paper in the introduction, but this is a fairly minor comment in relation to otherwise strong written communication skills. While all students struggle to some degree with integrating research findings, these papers did a nice job of talking about how different studies fit together in relation to the topic.

**‘B’ papers:**

The group of 'B' papers demonstrated a fair amount of competence in regards to written communication, but there were clear areas for improvement. Two of the papers would have benefited from a clearer description of the topic and organization of the paper in the introductory paragraphs. Two of the papers also had room for improvement in relation to the literature reviews. In one paper there was little attempt to integrate the various literature, with this section structured more like an annotated bibliography. In the second, the student could have provided more detail about the studies covered in the literature review. Overall, these papers were less comprehensive and less cohesive than the 'A' papers in communicating ideas. Finally, as a whole, these papers contained more spelling and grammatical errors than did the papers in the 'A' group.

**'C' papers:**

In terms of written communication, this group of papers shared common themes leading to their placement in the 'C' category. First, these papers – as a group – consistently had more grammar and spelling errors than the papers in the other categories. Especially common were run-on sentences. All three of these papers would have greatly benefited from additional editing to identify poorly constructed sentences. These papers also did a poor job of clearly stating the topic and letting the reader know what they would encounter in the various sections. The papers would jump directly from introduction to literature review without providing an organizational transition. And finally, these papers (as a group) suffered from a lack of comprehensiveness and cohesiveness—the differences between these papers and the 'A' papers were stark on these dimensions.

**Recommendations:**

Being able to write clearly and express one's ideas in a cogent fashion is one of the fundamental skills associated with a college degree. The fact that we find that a significant number of our students struggle to communicate effectively is not a new finding, but one that warrants additional scrutiny. We have discussed requiring our students to complete an additional writing intensive course, either in the major or outside the major. We will discuss with the faculty a plan to move forward on this course of action. Additionally, students writing 'C' papers simply did not put in the level of effort similar to the 'B' and (especially) the 'A' paper writers. Perhaps less freedom/flexibility in terms of paper page length requirements and more accountability with edits from 'first draft' to 'final draft' would help correct this issue.

*Learning Outcome 6: Written Communication:* Our students will demonstrate appropriate writing practices and formats and effective written communication and editing skills

<b>Grading Criteria</b>	<b>Poor (1)</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory (2)</b>	<b>Average (3)</b>	<b>Above Average (4)</b>	<b>Sophisticated (5)</b>
<b>Motivation of Topic</b>	The topic is unclear with no general introduction to the paper	The topic is known but there is essentially no introduction that motivates the paper.	The topic is clearly stated, the paper has some introductory material, but the importance could be more strongly stated.	The topic is clear and the introduction motivates the paper, but importance of the topic could be more strongly stated.	The paper begins by clearly stating the topic, the relevance, and their contribution.
<b>Review of Relevant Literature</b>	Student provides little or no evidence that relates to the topic.	Student provides limited evidence, but sources are not clear and not applicable (e.g., Wikipedia entries).	Student discusses some of the relevant literature, but does so one-at-a-time with no discussion of how they related to one-another.	Student discusses and integrates the literature, but is unclear how their specific topic fits into this discussion.	Student provides a literature review that discusses how findings relate to one-another, and uses this to identify gaps in knowledge that inform the topic.
<b>Structure and Organization</b>	The essay is confusing with no organization.	The main points of the essay are ambiguous, making the writer's ideas difficult to follow.	Writing has minimal organization and a basic thesis statement, but does not go beyond the basics.	Writing follows a unified and logical organization, but sometimes drifts from the thesis.	Organization is unified and logical, with excellent transitions
<b>Grammar and Punctuation</b>	Severe problems with grammar, usage, or mechanics show very poor control of language and may significantly impede understanding.	Numerous errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics show poor control of language and may at times impede understanding.	The essay has a few major errors and multiple minor errors, but almost all sentences are clear and understandable.	The essay has few major errors. There may be multiple minor errors as long as they do not interfere with understanding.	The essay has no major grammatical and punctuation errors and very few minor errors. Any minor errors do not interfere with the understanding of the essay.

**SOCI 499 – Senior Thesis Capstone**  
**Instructor: Maggie Thorsen**

**Assessment by: Cody Warner and David Eitle**  
**Learning Outcomes: Empiricism**

SOCI 499 is an upper division sociology course whose stated learning objectives are: (1) think about and apply what you have learned in Sociology to study a specific topic of interest to you from a sociological perspective; (2) develop a theoretically informed sociological research question; (3) situate the research question in the relevant literature; (4) find relevant data to the research question and empirically examine the data; (5) produce a research paper project; and (6) present the paper/proposal to faculty and peers in a poster session to be held at the end of the semester.

We randomly selected 9 papers to evaluate in relation to the learning objective of *empiricism*. As per the program learning outcomes, empiricism is defined as: “Our students will demonstrate an understanding of the roles and uses of evidence in qualitative and quantitative methods.” Three ‘A’ papers, three ‘B’ papers, and three ‘C’ papers were selected for the assessment. According to the course assignments and syllabus, students had choose a research topic, review the literature, and do one of the following: complete a research paper (including basic data analysis) or complete a detailed research proposal. In order to evaluate empiricism, the relevant portions of the paper are the data/methods and the results.

We constructed the scoring rubric (attached) independent of the paper assignment itself, since the purpose of the assessment is to determine whether learning outcomes are being met. We defined four elements related to the use of data, data analysis, and presentation of findings. As such, we adopt a working definition of empiricism as an ability to work with data and clearly describe research findings. Nonetheless, it is an important caveat to note that the goals of the paper assignment may not be entirely consistent with the assessment of this particular learning outcome. We discuss this in our recommendations, below.

**‘A’ papers:**

The three ‘A’ papers that we reviewed showed a clear understanding of empiricism. Two of these papers used longitudinal data (the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth [NLSY]), and one used primary data collection to conduct a content analysis of themes in published books. The two papers that used the NLSY provided a good general overview of the data, and then clearly defined the main measures used in the paper. Each of these papers also discussed the statistical tests they would use, but it seemed (at times) that the students were writing a bit beyond their comprehension. The content analysis study could have provided a bit more information about the data gathered, but did an excellent job defining the main concepts. All of the papers included ample discussion of the results, and it was clear that the students had a clear handle on the correct interpretation of the findings.

**‘B’ papers:**

The ‘B’ papers varied in their overall understanding of empiricism. This is to be expected because final paper grades are based on more than just the data and results sections. Students may show a modest understanding of the concept of empiricism, but do well in other aspects of the paper. Two of these papers provided a good description of the data, while the third provided only limited information. Two of the papers also provided good information about the measures they were using, while the third spent little time discussing the measures. As a group, the ‘B’ papers did not do as well as the ‘A’ papers in presenting the results. The tables and figures were not well formatted or labeled. Again, the issue of brevity (relative to the ‘A’ papers) appears to be part of the problem; authors of ‘B’ papers do not sufficiently elaborate on the findings or their interpretations. This may be because they are not knowledgeable enough to elaborate, or because they are not putting in sufficient effort in writing the paper.

**‘C’ papers:**

As a group, the ‘C’ papers clearly struggled to demonstrate an understanding of the concept of empiricism. In general, the papers failed to provide an adequate description of the data that they would be using. The papers did a fairly good job discussing the measures they would be using, but the authors failed to demonstrate competency about the use of statistical tests in their analyses. Additionally, ‘C’ students failed to put in sufficient effort in presenting the information. In one case the results were simply copied/pasted from a statistical program, and multiple pages of tables/figures would be presented with no interpretive text. Overall, these papers suffered from brevity and a limited understanding of interpreting their results.

**Recommendations:**

Overall, we saw a great deal of variation with regards to student understanding of the role and use of evidence with both qualitative and quantitative methods. Again, effort varied considerably, which clearly affects the display of understanding the concept of empiricism. Nonetheless, there is a need for some corrective action to try to improve student understanding. One possible point of emphasis could be having the SOCI 318 course (instructor) place more emphasis on student recognition of the appropriate use of qualitative and quantitative data to address questions, test theory, and interpret results. Additionally, the rest of the faculty might consider ‘unpacking’ the process of moving from theory to data to analysis to findings and interpretation, so that students develop a better understanding of the research process.

*Learning Outcome 7: Empiricism:* Our students will demonstrate an understanding of the roles and uses of evidence in qualitative and quantitative methods.

<b>Grading Criteria</b>	<b>Poor (1)</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory (2)</b>	<b>Average (3)</b>	<b>Above Average (4)</b>	<b>Sophisticated (5)</b>
<b>Description of Data</b>	It is unclear what data are used or how the data applies to the topic.	The data is only briefly discussed and it is still unclear how it applies to the topic at hand.	Data and variables (if applicable) are stated, but little to no description of the data used.	The data and variables (if applicable) are described, but measurement could be discussed in more detail.	The data used in the study are described, measurement (if applicable) is clear, and connection to topic is clear.
<b>Analytic Approach</b>	Little to no discussion about how data will be analyzed or why it is a good approach.	Only brief mention of how the data will be analyzed, but no justification of approach.	Student provides limited information on both the approach, and the reasons why the approach is appropriate.	Student outlines the specific strategies, but falls short in conveying an understanding of the particular technique.	Student describes how the qualitative or quantitative data will be analyzed and justifies their particular approach.
<b>Presentation of Findings</b>	The paper includes no tables or figures, or it is largely unclear how results of the proposed study would be presented.	Tables or figures are included, but it is unclear what they contain or how they are to be interpreted.	Paper includes relevant tables or figures with improved formatting, but relevant or main findings do not stand out.	Relevant tables or figures are included, but could be improved by slight formatting or organizational changes.	The paper includes appropriate tables or figures that display the main findings in a clear and straightforward manner.
<b>Interpretation of Findings</b>	The paper largely lacks information that interprets findings in relation to the research topic at hand.	Interpretation of findings contain numerous errors that are inconsistent with the approach taken.	Paper provides basic information on relevant univariate or bivariate statistics, but limited interpretation or application to research topic.	Student provides a good description of findings, but could provide additional interpretation to connect to the research topic.	Student correctly describes the findings, and provides a correct interpretation for any univariate or bivariate data analysis.

## **Learning Outcomes Summary for Fall 2014-Spring 2015**

The Sociology Assessment Committee met and reviewed two different courses, based on our assessment plan schedule: SOCI 499 Senior Thesis Capstone (Fall 2014) and SOCI 499 Senior Thesis Capstone (Spring 2015). It is important to note that the assessment plan originally called for the assessment of SOCI 318 Research Methods in relation to empiricism. However, it became clear that there was not an adequate essay question or assignment related to uses of qualitative or quantitative data. The learning outcomes that were assessed, based on a prior assignment of learning outcomes from our assessment plan, were: a) written communication – demonstrate appropriate writing practices and formats and effective written communication and editing skills; and b) empiricism – demonstrate an understanding of the roles and uses of evidence in qualitative and quantitative methods. Our review procedures entail using constructed rubrics designed (before use) to evaluate the learning outcomes with samples of student coursework.

### **Learning Outcomes: Written Communication**

As stated in our recommendation section, the assessment committee concluded that the ability of our students to write effectively varies tremendously. This is due, in part, to what appears to be large differences in effort between ‘A’ students and ‘C’ students. Simply put, it is immediately evident that ‘A’ students take their writing and written communication skills more seriously than do ‘C’ students. We also find, as we have found in regards to many of our learning outcomes, that our C students struggle to write in a clear and organized manner, and that this struggle is independent of the effort put into the writing. Many of our students simply struggle to write well. That this is evident even in the culminating course for our student majors (SOCI 499 – Capstone), suggests that these issues are not being appropriately addressed in lower-division courses. We will discuss our recommendation below in the action plan.

### **Learning Outcomes: Empiricism**

The assessment committee concluded that a significant proportion of our students were not able to clearly articulate the role and uses of evidence, regardless of whether that evidence is from qualitative or quantitative sources. We have no magical solution to this concern, but we think that encouraging the faculty to emphasize the research process and the connections between data, analysis, and theory may reinforce early lessons regarding empiricism broached in our statistics and methods courses. Additionally, we will forward our suggestions to the instructor of the course and encourage the instructor to take the steps outlined in the recommendation section.

### **Action Plan**

Based upon the assessment and our faculty discussion, we have decided on the following actions:

1. Propose adding a writing intensive course to the required courses for all majors. Whether this course would be a lower division course in the major that focuses on writing and reading in sociology or a course offered by English will be discussed.
2. Emphasize to our faculty/instructors (in addition to students) the importance of students clearly demonstrating an understanding of the research process. Beyond simply knowing a theory, students should also learn how data informs theory, and should be able to demonstrate that they can 'move' from theory to data to analysis to findings and interpretation.

Suggest to faculty that they provide more opportunities for peers to provide models of successful work to each other. For instance, incorporating more peer review of work prior to submission to the instructor may improve the overall quality of the work submitted. Providing examples of 'A' papers prior to an assignment being submitted (i.e., using last year's 'A' work) so that students have peer models to emulate.

## **Learning outcomes reviewed in Anthropology for 2014-2015:**

*(1) Students shall learn to analyze, compare & interpret contemporary, historic, and prehistoric data from several societies or eras of past human experience.*

*(2) Students shall demonstrate the ability to write a research paper on a topic in biological anthropology using primary professional literature.*

Two classes were reviewed for the academic year 2014-2015 following the established review procedures. A summary of the review procedures, outcomes, and new strategies follows the review of each class.

### **ANTY 428: Anthropological Theory Professor: Laurence M. Carucci Fall 2014**

**Assessment by: Dr. Laurence Carucci**

**Learning outcome: Students shall learn to analyze, compare & interpret contemporary, historic, and prehistoric data from several societies or eras of past human experience.**

An assessment of this learning outcome for Anthropological Theory is not difficult inasmuch as specific course outcomes for Anthropology 428RS include:

- (1) Demonstrate a capstone understanding of anthropological principles, theories, and critiques as they emerge historically through reading and analyzing primary sources
- (2) Explain and utilize a variety of anthropological theories, concepts, and critiques in a comparative and synthetic manner
- (3) Assess and understand anthropological theories in relation to their modes of production, distribution, and interpretation including the historical/social frames from which they emerge, the diverse societies they represent, and the groups/persons who (re) interpret them
- (4) Demonstrate understanding and consistent application of theoretical ideas and interpretive strategies in an extended research project on a past anthropological theorist or through a grounded theoretical interpretation of a field-based research project presented in oral and written (or alternative media) form. Situate within the existing analytic and/or methodological literature in the field.

This course provides an overview of theories in anthropology since the inception of the discipline in the mid-nineteenth century. The class reads original works that provide examples of major theoretical approaches and advances in the field. As a discipline grounded in field research, this allows students to understand how anthropologists developed important new methodologies and theoretical approaches to analyze, compare and interpret data on many

different societies around the world. Through an exposure to the historically emergent array of theories, students come to understand how the best known anthropologists have dealt with prehistoric, historic, and contemporary data and, as part of their project for the course, are expected to demonstrate their understanding of these analytic and interpretative techniques.

The course material was presented through a combination lecture and discussion. The discussions followed daily topical readings from distinguished historical figures in the field of anthropology who have written about a wide array of different societies. By student request, in 2014 the course paid particular attention to recent theoretical advances. In addition to a wide array of historical materials from journals and salient book chapters, students also read four theoretically sophisticated books published between 2004 and 2013. These readings and subsequent discussions gave students an opportunity to explore the most up-to-date anthropological theories and compare these theoretical approaches with theories from earlier eras in the history of anthropology.

Assignments for the class included three written take-home examinations, covering different sets of readings. In addition, there was a project with the topic selected by each individual student. The projects either involved field research and analysis using a particular theoretical perspective or in depth of a specific anthropological theorist who was not covered in the class readings.

The anthropology faculty agreed to use the first exam and final exam as a way to measure students' abilities in terms of this learning outcome.

The scoring method as defined in the document that outlines the anthropology learning outcomes is:

Unacceptable	1	(for graded assignments = D, D-, or F)
Minimally acceptable	2	(for graded assignments = D+/C-)
Acceptable	3	(for graded assignments = C/C+)
Exceeds expectation	4	(for graded assignments = B's or A-)
Exceptional	5	(for graded assignments = A/A+)

24 students enrolled in the course, though five of those students failed to complete **any** work for the class. Since no judgment can be made about the quality of the work from those students, their final scores have not been included in the sample, even though they elected not to drop the class. Therefore, the assessment is based on the materials submitted for the course by 19 students.

Based on final grades for the course, and using the above scale students achieved an overall score of 83.098, which, on the above scoring schema, "**exceeds expectations.**" Based on scores from the first exam and final exam only (as specified by the assessment methodology) students averaged an 83.3 score. For a capstone course in Anthropological Theory, these scores demonstrate that the class is challenging, but certainly not impossible, for those students who dedicate themselves to the course of study. This is precisely what the faculty expects of the capstone courses in Anthropology since both capstones are designed to be rigorous and synthetic.

**Assessment by: Dr. Cristina A. Pop**

**Learning Outcome: Learn to analyze, compare & interpret contemporary, historic, and prehistoric data from several societies or eras of past human experience.**

The syllabus for ANTY 428 (Anthropological Theory) identifies understanding of anthropological principles, theories, and critiques as they emerge historically through reading and analyzing primary sources as one of the course outcomes. In addition to the syllabus, the background, requirements, and expectations of the exams are explained in handouts provided to each of the students. For the first exam, students are expected to select and illustrate five major critical contributions to the anthropological theory. For the final exam, students are asked to compare and contrast the theoretical focus of two of the main readings for the class.

As part of the assessment process, Dr. Carucci provided a sample of the first and final exam papers (42%, N=9) that covered the range from “acceptable” to “exceptional.” In reading these exams, I found that students at the lower range of the scoring (acceptable to exceeds expectations) produced papers that suffered from the following problems: (1) Exam papers were underdeveloped—usually shorter than the assigned 8, respectively 8 to 12 pages—and required more detail in description and analysis; (2) Emphasis was placed on description without the necessary analytical component; (3) Exam papers needed better organizational structure (e.g., clear introduction and logical development of the paper); and (4) Exam papers misused dated notions that were not an accurate reflection of their authors’ actual contribution to anthropological theory. In contrast, the exam papers at the top end of the scale (exceptional) were very well-organized and well-written, and incorporated both description and analysis. These papers successfully addressed the assigned topic and contained relevant references to the current state of research.

In sum, I found the first and final exam papers to be an excellent way to assess and develop students’ writing and analytical skills. Students are able to summarize, compare and contrast concepts acquired through reading essential works pertaining to anthropological theory. The sample of student exams demonstrates that the course “exceeds expectations” in terms of the designated learning outcome of learning to analyze, compare & interpret contemporary, historic, and prehistoric data from several societies or eras of past human experience.

**ANTY 313: Biological Anthropology  
Professor: Jack Fisher  
Spring 2015**

**Assessment by: Dr. Jack Fisher**

**Learning Outcome: Demonstrate the ability to write a research paper on a topic in biological anthropology using primary professional literature.**

This course provides students with a solid introduction to the study of humankind from the perspective of biological anthropology and, more broadly, biological evolution. This course encompasses such questions as: *What is evolution, and how does it work? What is the evolutionary history, including the fossil record, for human evolution? What are the biological and behavioral similarities and differences between humans and other animals—especially other primates? How does non-human primate behavior help us to understand the place of humans in nature? How and why do human populations vary biologically from one another? Is there a biological basis to human behaviors? How do human biology and culture affect each other?* This course, additionally, contributes to the development of students' skills in research and writing.

Course materials were presented through a combination lecture and discussion of textbook chapters and articles from professional journals. The journal articles covered a range of topics pertaining to biological anthropology, including the development of evolutionary theory; the evolutionary relationship between non-human primate mating systems and neocortex (brain) size; the evolution of culture in humans and in non-human primates and other animals; and interpretations of recent important fossil hominin discoveries. These readings provided a counterbalance to the textbook by giving students the opportunity to read, analyze, and synthesize articles written by professional anthropologists for professional anthropologists. The class also included two exercises on topics that are important in biological anthropology. One exercise required students to identify the cause(s) of infanticide among non-human primates by analyzing data from two journal articles that reported field observations of infanticide. The other exercise required students to make anatomical comparisons of several high quality replicas of the crania of fossil hominins and modern humans. This course also included three exams to test the students' knowledge—two mid-term exams and the final exam. All the exams consisted of a combination of essay questions and short identification questions.

The students, additionally, had to design, carry out, and write up a major research project on an appropriate topic in biological anthropology. Each student decided on their own research topic, which had to be approved by the instructor. This assignment required students to consult appropriate professional journal articles and/or books.

Thirty-four students turned in a final research paper. To quantify the research outcomes for this course, I present the scores on the research paper, which was worth 100 points. I aligned the outcomes with the anthropology program's Indicators of Student Achievement:

Unacceptable	1	(for graded assignments = D, D-, or F)
Minimally acceptable	2	(for graded assignments = D+/C-)
Acceptable	3	(for graded assignments = C/C+)
Exceeds expectations	4	(for graded assignments = B's or A-)
Exceptional	5	(for graded assignments = A/A+)

The highest score on the research paper was 100 points (out of 100 possible points), the lowest score was 75, and the average score was 86. This indicates that the class as a whole “**exceeds expectations**” for the learning outcome of **demonstrating the ability to write a research paper on a topic in biological anthropology using primary professional literature**. Three students’ work was “acceptable”, 18 students rated as “exceeds expectations”, and 13 students rated as “exceptional”.

Among the lower-ranking (“acceptable”) students on the research paper, their research paper typically suffered from one or more of the following shortcomings: (1) the paper tended to be somewhat superficial and descriptive as reflected by inadequate depth and detail and/or by the absence of critical evaluation/assessment; (2) the student consulted relatively few professional publications—with some students relying heavily on the course textbook; (3) the paper sometimes suffered from weak organization and/or writing (in clarity of expression, punctuation, and the like); (4) they tended not to be thorough in citing in the body of their paper the sources they had consulted; and (5) the bibliography had missing or incomplete entries, and/or the entries were not listed in alphabetical order. These students probably would benefit from receiving additional guidance and support from the instructor as they design, carry out, and write up their research project. For students whose paper was “exceptional”, their paper addressed an interesting and important topic, they engaged the topic thoroughly and in depth, the paper was thorough, thoughtful, and persuasive, and they consulted a substantial number of professional journal articles and/or books.

In sum, assessment of the research paper indicates that this course as a whole is successful in teaching biological anthropology and in providing an effective learning environment for students to develop their abilities to successfully carry out analysis and research.

**Assessment by: Dr. Michael Neeley**

**Learning Outcome: Demonstrate the ability to write a research paper on a topic in biological anthropology using primary professional literature.**

The syllabus for ANTY 313 (Biological Anthropology) clearly identifies the writing of a research paper as one of the course outcomes. In addition to the syllabus, the research paper—procedures and expectations—is further explained in a handout provided to each of the students. As part of this exercise, students are expected to generate a topic of interest, conduct the appropriate research—using primary sources in journal articles and book chapters—and generate a final paper that will “evaluate, assess, and synthesize information”.

As part of the assessment process, Dr. Fisher provided a sample of the final papers (20%, N=7) that covered the range from “acceptable” to “exceptional”. In reading these papers, I found that students at the lower range of the scoring (acceptable to exceeds expectations) produced papers that suffered from a variety of problems. These included (1) greater emphasis on description without the necessary analytical component; (2) papers that were underdeveloped—usually shorter than the desired 10 pages—and required more detail in description and analysis; (3) a need for better organizational structure (e.g., clear introduction and logical development of the paper); and (4) the use of sources that were dated and not an accurate reflection of the current state of research in that field. In contrast, the papers at the top end of the scale (exceptional)

were very well-organized, incorporated a nice balance of description and analysis, well-written, and contained interesting and relevant critiques of the current state of research.

In sum, I found the research paper to be an excellent way to assess and develop students' writing and analytical skills. Students are able to apply concepts cultivated through reading professional articles (part of the class assignments) to the writing of a research paper of their own choice. The sample of student paper demonstrates that the course "exceeds expectations" in terms of the designated learning outcome of demonstrating an ability to write a research paper on a topic of biological anthropology using primary professional literature.

### **Learning Outcomes Summary for Fall 2014-Spring 2015 ANTHROPOLOGY FACULTY RESPONSE**

The faculty of the Anthropology Program met to review the assessment plan for the Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 terms. The reviews were of two upper division courses. The first of these was Anthropology 428, Anthropological Theory, which was assessed to ascertain student success in the learning outcome to "*learn to analyze, compare & interpret contemporary, historic, and prehistoric data from several societies or eras of past human experience*". The second course was Anthropology 313, Biological Anthropology, which was assessed to measure the learning outcome to "*demonstrate the ability to write a research paper on a topic in biological anthropology using primary professional literature*". The enrollments for these courses were 19 students (Anthropological Theory) and 34 students (Biological Anthropology). Our review procedures involve having the instructor use the relevant criteria to review his/her own course and have the second specialist in this sub-discipline (archaeology in the case of Biological Anthropology and social and cultural anthropology in the case of Anthropological Theory) read a subset of the materials submitted by the students to see if the relevant criteria has been met.

For Anthropological Theory, Dr. Carucci assessed that the course had exceeded expectations (4 on a scale of 5) in requiring students to analyze, compare and interpret contemporary, historic, and prehistoric data from several societies or eras of past human experience. The second reviewer (Dr. Pop) examined a sub-set of the exams and independently agreed that the course exceeded expectations with regard to the proposed learning outcomes. In the second course, Biological Anthropology, the instructor (Dr. Fisher) determined that the course, on average, exceeded expectations (4 on a scale of 5) in meeting the learning outcome. The second reviewer (Dr. Neeley), reading a sub-set of the student papers, agreed that the course exceeded expectations with regard to providing students the opportunity to demonstrate the ability to write a research paper on a topic in biological anthropology using primary professional literature.

While we agree that the courses under review here are successful in meeting the learning outcomes, there are typically a handful of students who are not particularly successful in the courses. As part of our assessment, this is an opportunity to reflect upon the methods and strategies used and suggest ways in which the student outcomes can be improved. As both of these assessments involved writing (term papers and take-home exams), we identify some of the difficulties with these projects and suggest some possible remedies to improve student outcomes. A common problem with these assignments is the underdevelopment of ideas and the use of

dated or very limited sources. From our experience, these flaws are typically associated with hastily prepared papers without allowing sufficient time to conduct the research and “digest” or think about the topic. One possible solution would be to (1) require students to select topics well in advance of the due date and (2) meet with the faculty and provide a list of suitable source materials. This would enable the faculty member to provide feedback on the topic (whether it is suitable and reasonable) and identify gaps in their review of the literature. A second problem with many of the papers on the lower end of the scale involves the organization or structure of the paper (e.g., clear statements of the goals and the logic of the arguments). While teaching the “nuts and bolts” of writing is often beyond our discipline, helping students identify good, clear writing is certainly within reason. One potential remedy would require students, when reading professional articles, to identify the structure of the paper in terms of goals and supporting arguments. This would enable them to “model” or copy writing structures that can contribute to improving their own writing activities. It is our hope that implementing new research and writing assessment strategies will help students at the lower level move toward accomplishing the goals of increased comprehension, analytic sophistication, and written expression in the field of anthropology.