

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

September 12, 2016

SOCI 499 – Senior Thesis Capstone
Instructor: Kaylin Greene

Assessment by: Cody Warner and Maggie Thorsen
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 selected 7 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 one C paper were selected for the assessment. According to the assignment, students had to complete a final project that synthesized independent and group work across the semester. The final project had to contain the following sections: introduction, method, results, and references. Students were also graded on grammar/clarity/organization as well as statistical analyses submitted along with the project. To examine variation in written communication across the project, we focused on the introduction and literature review sections of the projects.

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. In particular, these papers were set apart from the rest in the ability to identify and motivate research topics. Throughout the group of ‘A’ papers it was easy to determine the main argument of the paper, as this was generally clearly stated in the opening paragraphs.

Furthermore, the literature discussed in these papers show a clear connection to that argument. The ‘A’ papers, as a group, were also very well-written, with few (if any) grammatical errors. There was a clear difference in strength of writing, overall, when comparing the ‘A’ papers with the other papers reviewed. There was some variation across these papers in the general introduction to the paper, but there was consistency across the papers in that research questions were clearly identified, and the literature was clearly tied to the research questions.

‘B’ papers:

There was a fairly large gap in quality of written communication between the ‘A’ papers and the ‘B’ papers. As a group, the papers did provide information about the larger research topic, but the link between the topic and the specific hypotheses or research questions was difficult to follow across these papers. That is, and compared to the ‘A’ papers, this group of papers struggled narrowing down from a broad topic to specific research questions. And, in doing so, struggled to find and integrate relevant research to build an argument for a specific question or expectation. Literature reviews tended to be a little more disconnected, with little organization around a common theme. The overall quality of the writing was also poorer in this group of papers, with more grammatical errors and less consistent citing of sources.

‘C’ papers:

There was only a single paper in this group because students turned in rough drafts of parts of the final project throughout the semester. Thus, even the ‘C’ paper was likely a large improvement over early submissions of project components. That said, the paper in this group did struggle in terms of development of hypotheses, especially in developing any hypotheses that were grounded in sociological theories or concepts. The literature review was short and not well-developed, and there were more issues with grammar and punctuation. There was not a huge gap in terms of written communication between the ‘C’ paper and the group of ‘B’ papers, and this paper likely earned a lower grade because of issues with data analysis and interpretation of results.

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. One issue the Assessment Committee finds in relation to written communication is a clear discrepancy between students who can derive research questions from broader topics (the ‘A’ papers) and students who struggle to do this (all of the other papers). We recommend that our students get more exposure to research questions and more practice developing testable research questions from larger topical areas. 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, it appears that students writing ‘C’ papers did not put in the same level of effort than ‘B’ and (especially) ‘A’ paper writers.

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

Grading Criteria	Poor (1)	Unsatisfactory (2)	Average (3)	Above Average (4)	Sophisticated (5)
Motivation of Topic	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.
Review of Relevant Literature	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.
Structure and Organization	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
Grammar and Punctuation	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 358 – Crime & Inequality
Instructor: Cody Warner

Assessment by: Cody Warner and Maggie Thorsen
Learning Outcomes: Sociological Application

SOCI 358 is an upper division sociology course whose stated learning objectives are: (1) Understand historical and contemporary trends in crime and criminal justice. (2) Explain class, race, and gender variation in victimization. (3) Explain class, race, and gender variation in rule making and enforcement. (4) Explain class, race, and gender variation in punishment and incarceration. (5) Demonstrate an understanding of how class, race, and gender intersect in relation to crime/criminal justice. (6) Identify policies that have contributed to inequalities in crime/criminal justice, and develop policy recommendations.

We selected 9 papers to evaluate in relation to the learning objective of *sociological application*. As per the program learning outcomes, sociological application is defined as: “Our students will formulate research questions based on critical readings and understandings of sociological research.” Three ‘A’ papers, three ‘B’ papers, and three ‘C’ papers were selected for the assessment. According to the course term paper assignment, students had select a research topic for examination after listening to an episode of a podcast called *Criminal*. The assignment gave students broad discretion to select a topic so long as it captured some aspect of the intersections of crime (offending, victimization, rule making, policing, punishment) and inequality (race, gender, class, sexuality, or some combination). After selecting an episode-informed topic, students had to craft a research question for additional inquiry and overview published research to inform that question.

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 sociological application: formulation of sociological research questions, support for research questions, overall organization, and spelling/grammar. For the purposes of this assessment, we adopt a working definition of sociological application as an ability to craft a research topic from a piece of popular media and explore that topic using empirical research. 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 group of ‘A’ papers were set apart from the rest of the papers in terms of recognizing sociological concepts in outside material. That is, all of the papers in this group were able to clearly articulate the connections between the material presented in the podcast episode and themes related to the course (i.e., inequality as it is related to crime and the criminal justice system). In addition, the papers in this group did a nice job reviewing relevant research in an integrated fashion, with one paper organized

around theoretical perspectives and a second around conceptual models. This was a big difference between the 'A' papers and the other papers. The papers in this group used the outside material to craft a research question, found appropriate research that spoke to that question, and discussed the research in a synthesized fashion. The papers excelled by reconnecting the literature with the podcast episode in the conclusion. These papers were all well-written, clearly organized, and used appropriate references and citations.

'B' papers:

In general, the 'B' papers showed less of a connection between the podcast episode and a sociological concept or research question. This was evident in several respects. First, the research questions in these papers were not necessarily connected to sociological themes in the podcast episode. The questions were also not necessarily connected to course themes of inequality and crime. Second, the quality and appropriateness of the sources was not as strong as the 'A' papers. The papers in this group used published research, but there was little attempt to find a group of studies that specifically focused on the topic at hand. Finally, the organizational flow of these papers was much poorer than with the 'A' papers. A common approach was to sequentially discuss the sources, rather than integrating them into a coherent discussion.

'C' papers:

As a group, the 'C' papers clearly struggled to apply sociological concepts or research questions to outside material. There was little effort to identify sociological concepts in the podcast episode, and as a result little effort to craft research questions that were tied to themes in the episode. These papers were also poorly organized, with two providing annotated bibliographies rather than an actual review of the sources. Finally, papers in this group were poorly written, with more grammatical errors, incorrect citation formats, and a general indication that the students did not spend an adequate amount of time reading the outside sources.

Recommendations:

Overall, we saw a great deal of variation regarding crafting and exploring research questions. Again, it appears that effort varied considerably, but only the 'A' papers displayed an adequate ability to (1) recognize sociological concepts in non-sociological materials (in this case a podcast episode), and (2) craft research questions related to those concepts. Students would greatly benefit from more practice identifying sociological concepts/themes in materials they encounter outside of class. Additionally, only the 'A' papers did an adequate job (1) finding appropriate sources and (2) synthesizing those sources into a coherent discussion. Students would benefit from additional practice finding the "right" types of sources to help them answer specific research questions. We discuss these issues more in the overall summary, below.

Learning Outcome 4: Sociological Application: Our students will formulate research questions based on critical readings and understandings of sociological research.

Grading Criteria	Poor (1)	Unsatisfactory (2)	Average (3)	Above Average (4)	Sophisticated (5)
Formulation of Sociological Research Questions	The research question or problem is neither clear nor adequate and the student fails to demonstrate an understanding of how research questions contribute to sociology	The research question or problem is neither clear nor adequate	The research question or problem is not completely clear and requires significant modifications.	The research question or problem is clear and only requires minor modifications. It may not be very compelling or original, however.	The research question or problem is clear and compelling. It also demonstrates some originality in thought.
Support for Research Questions	Student does not provide any support beyond individual experience, speculation, and conjecture for research	Student largely fails to provide support for research question or problem, fails to use appropriate research databases to inform the research question.	Student provides some basis for research question, but large gaps exist in providing relevant theories, research, and sources.	Student includes appropriate theories, research evidence and sources to generate research question or problem, but may be missing some relevant material	Student selects appropriate theories, research evidence and sources to generate research question or problem
Overall Organization	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
Grammar and Punctuation	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.

Learning Outcomes Summary for Fall 2015-Spring 2016

The Sociology Assessment Committee met and reviewed two different courses: SOCI 499 Senior Thesis Capstone (Spring 2016) and SOCI 358 Crime and Inequality (Fall 2015). It is important to note that the assessment plan originally called for the assessment of “Oral Communication” using an upper-division sociology elective. However, it became clear that, without proper foresight, there would not be an appropriate course or assignment to assess oral communication. Moving forward, the Assessment Committee will identify a course that incorporates an oral communication component and target that for future assessment. Thus, this assessment report targeted two learning outcomes: a) written communication – demonstrate appropriate writing practices and formats and effective written communication and editing skills; and b) sociological application – formulate research questions based on critical readings and understandings of sociological research. 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 noted in the assessment above, there was a clear distinction between those students who write at the ‘A’ level and students who write at all other levels. Some of this appears to be a reflection in effort, as ‘A’ papers appear to spend more time discussing sources and reviewing literature. However, the big difference in written communication was ability to review existing literature in a coherent and integrated fashion. Good students provided a discussion around a research question, with the sources used to help build an argument. Other students (even at the ‘B’ level) simply discuss one source after another. There is little effort to understand how the sources fit together or how they help the reader understand the question at hand. We discuss some options to help improve the written communication skills of our students in the Action Plan, below.

Learning Outcomes: Sociological application

As with written communication, it is clear looking at the examples that there is a big difference in the ability of students to recognize sociological concepts, derive research questions from these concepts, and find literature that ties the questions to the concepts. The group of ‘A’ papers were able to recognize relevant sociological concepts in non-sociological material (that is, materials outside of course readings). Students in other grade categories had a more difficult time identifying these concepts and then crafting research questions to explore these concepts. Furthermore, much like with written communication, there was a clear distinction between students who could synthesize relevant research around a particular topic or theme, and students who can find literature but struggle to present it in a coherent manner. Furthermore, it is clear from the ‘C/D’ papers that some of our students lack a general understanding about how papers should be organized and formatted. We discuss some options to help improve sociological application of research questions in the Action Plan, below.

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. Suggest to faculty that they spend more time dissecting published research examples as a group. This should help all students get a better grasp on identifying the research questions, identifying key pieces of evidence that support the particular question/expectation, and the basic organization of arguments (and paper organization in general)
3. Propose that faculty provide students with more practice doing “targeted” literature reviews. If a class is going to involve a research paper or writing component where students need to find published research, then it would benefit students to get more practice in this endeavor. With additional practice, our students should improve their ability to go from a broad topic to a particular questions, as well as using the right kinds of evidence (rather than what is easiest to find in an internet search)
4. 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 2015-2016:

(1) Students shall acquire research skills that include the acquisition, analysis, and synthesis of research materials in a report format.

(2) Students shall understand and articulate anthropological concepts and theories.

Two classes were reviewed for the academic year 2015-2016 following the established review procedures. A summary of the review procedures, outcomes, and new strategies follows the review of each class.

**ANTY 315: Forensic Anthropology
Professor: Jack Fisher
Fall 2015**

Assessment by: Dr. Jack Fisher

Learning Outcome: Acquire research skills that include the acquisition, analysis, and synthesis of research materials in a report format.

This course provides students with a solid introduction to forensic anthropology: the study of the human skeleton aimed at elucidating as much biological information as possible about the individual represented by a set of skeletal remains. The principal goals of this course are: 1) to learn in detail the cranial and postcranial anatomy of the human skeleton; and 2) to learn the analytical methods of forensic anthropology. Primary among these are analyses of skeletal remains aimed at attribution of the sex, age at death, living stature, and biological ancestry ("race") of the individual. Other important areas that were covered include determining the cause of death, estimating the time elapsed since death, recovery scene methods, legal and ethical responsibilities in forensic anthropology, and other such topics. Another important goal of this course is to contribute to the development of students' skills in research and writing.

Course materials were presented through a combination of (1) lecture and discussion of textbook chapters, and (2) hands-on examination, study, and analysis of human bones. The textbook provided essential information about the various topics on which the course is centered (how to estimate the sex of an individual from skeletal remains, recovery scene methods, and so forth). The hands-on portion of the course provided students with opportunities to put into practice the knowledge and information on, for example, estimating sex from bones.

The students were required to make life-sized, anatomically accurate drawings of most of the bones of the skeleton as an important component of learning to identify the different bones (humerus, femur, calcaneus, and so forth) and the various osteological landmarks present on the bones that have analytical importance. These drawings were graded.

Two exams tested the students' comprehension of the topics presented in the textbook (estimating the amount of time elapsed since death; legal and ethical responsibilities in forensic anthropology; and so forth). The students' knowledge of human osteology was tested with two "bone quizzes" in which the students had to correctly identify to skeletal element an array of bones (some complete, others fragmentary) with which they were presented.

The class also included a graded exercise in which the students analyzed two human skulls using standard methods of forensic anthropology. For one skull the goal was to estimate its **biological ancestry** ("race"), and for the other skull the goal was to estimate its **sex**. The methods they used were discriminant functions analysis based on a set of measurements of the crania that each student had to take, and anthroposcopic (visual) examination of the crania.

The students, additionally, had to design, carry out, and write up a major research project on an appropriate topic in forensic anthropology. Each student chose 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.

Twenty-eight students turned in a final research paper. In the following discussion, 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 68, and the average score was 90. This indicates that the class as a whole "**exceeds expectations**" for the learning outcome of "**acquire research skills that include the acquisition, analysis, and synthesis of research materials in a report format**". One student's work was "minimally acceptable", another student's work was "acceptable", 11 students' work rated as "exceeds expectations", and 15 students research paper was "exceptional".

Among the lower-ranking ("minimally acceptable" and "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; (3) the paper sometimes suffered from weak organization (e.g., little or no introduction) and/or writing (shortcomings in clarity of expression, punctuation, and the like); (4) the student did not adequately discuss how their research results are pertinent

to forensic anthropology; (5) they tended not to be thorough in citing in the body of their paper the sources they had consulted; and (6) 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. Some of the higher quality research projects involved an innovative experimental component that the student designed and carried out.

In sum, assessment of the research paper indicates that this course as a whole is successful in teaching forensic 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: Acquire research skills that include the acquisition, analysis, and synthesis of research materials in a report format.

In the syllabus for ANTY 315 (Forensic Anthropology), it is clearly stated that a research paper is one of the class outcomes. Students are expected to choose a topic of interest and use anthropological journals and books as part of the research process. The synthesis of this material is part of the research paper along with demonstrating the topic's relevance to forensic anthropology.

For this assessment, a sample of the final papers (21%, N=6) were provided ranging from “minimally acceptable” to “exceptional”. Reading through these papers, I found that the papers at the lower end of the scoring system (minimally acceptable to acceptable) exhibited several common problems. These included (1) lack of a clear organizational structure (e.g., the introduction did not clearly indicate what the paper was about and where the paper was going); (2) minimal use of reference materials (these often consisted of a few sources and did not reflect a detailed research activity or the state of research in the field; and (3) underdeveloped papers that did not meet the minimum length requirements. Those papers in the exceeds expectations range often were structurally more complete but they were missing minor elements, particularly in terms of how the paper relates to the larger field of forensic anthropology. Finally, the exceptional paper was very well-organized, laid out a coherent plan, followed the plan, and related the topic to the larger discipline.

In sum, I believe that the research paper served as an excellent means to assess and develop students' writing skills, particularly as it relates to “the acquisition, analysis, and synthesis of research materials”. It is apparent that students are able to take concepts that they have read from professional articles (part of the class assignments) and translate this into a research paper topic of their choice. The sample of papers from

ANTY 315 (Forensic Anthropology) demonstrates that the course on average “exceeds expectations” with regard to the learning outcome stated above.

ANTY428: Anthropological Theory
Professor: Tomomi Yamaguchi
Spring 2016

Assessment by: Dr. Tomomi Yamaguchi

Learning Outcome: Understanding and articulating anthropological concepts and theories

About the Course

Anthropological Theory is the course that provides advanced undergraduates with an understanding of how the field of anthropology developed over the past century and a half and what directions the field is currently pursuing. This course overviews several theoretical approaches to anthropology and to the historical contexts that led to their development and application. Readings for this section of the course deal with the classic social scientific theorists -- Marx, Durkheim, Freud, Weber, Boas -- and with a sampling of theorists representing different historical moments in Anthropology: nineteenth century social evolutionism, functionalism, early cultural theory, structuralism, and more recent theories such as post-structuralism, practice theory, feminist theory, and queer theory. This course will also examine ethnographic works by theorists of the current day.

The course included lectures, in-class and online discussion on the assigned readings and films, oral presentations and discussion led by students.

Learning Outcomes

- 1) Demonstrate a capstone understanding of anthropological principles, theories, and critiques as they emerge historically through reading 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, written, or alternative media form. Situate within the existing analytic and/or methodological literature in the field.

Assignments

There were four required books; one is a textbook which is a collection of articles by various theorists, and the rest are theoretical and ethnographic works by theorists from different time periods. Class participation and online participation are significant parts of the grade.

There were three essay exams and a final research project for the course. I will list them below, with brief explanation on how it is relevant to students' obtaining skills understanding and articulating anthropological concepts and theories.

1. Examinations

There were three examinations, composed of short answer and essay questions, administered during the semester. Short answer questions ask students to explain the main point of it, and demonstrate how it contributes to our understanding of the specific anthropological theory advocated by the author, at a specific historical moment. The essay questions ask students to write an essay in 5 pages, answering the questions on how theorists approach particular issues or theories based on the readings, lectures and class discussion.

2. Research Project

The projects were either field research inquiries that employ a particular theoretical approach or investigations of theorists. Most students either focused on one particular theorist's work, or dealt with a theoretical school (e.g. structural functionalism) in their papers, while there were a few who conducted ethnographic field research employing a particular theoretical approach (e.g. queer theory for the study of LGBTQ community at MSU).

To quantify the research outcomes of this course, I have used the scores on Exams and Research Project as the data source and aligned the outcomes with the proposed scoring method.

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

Scale:

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+)

Exam #1

18 out of 19 students submitted the exam

Exceptional 5

Exceeds expectation 10

Acceptable 2

Unacceptable 1

Exam #2

17 out of 19 students submitted the exam

Exceptional 2

Exceed expectation 11

Acceptable 3

Unacceptable 1

Exam #3

16 out of 19 students submitted the exam

Exceptional 3

Exceed expectation 10

Acceptable 2

Minimally acceptable 1

Research Project

17 out of 19 students submitted the project

Exceptional 4

Exceed expectation 11

Minimally acceptable 2

For all the written assignments, the majority of students fall into Exceptional and Exceed expectation categories, while a few students are in “acceptable,” “minimally acceptable” and “unacceptable” ranges. Students who were in the “minimally acceptable” and “unacceptable” ranges received better grades in some of the assignments, and in participation and presentations, and all of them who submitted all the assignments received grades of C- and above. Therefore, assessment on these major assignments in class demonstrates that the class as a whole exceeds learning outcomes for understanding and articulating anthropological concepts and theories.

Outside assessment of ANTY 428: Anthropological Theory

Assessment by: Laurence M. Carucci, Professor of Anthropology

Learning outcome: Understanding and articulating anthropological concepts and theories

Anthropological Theory is one of two capstone courses in anthropology and I am providing an outside assessment of the course, offered by Dr. Tomomi Yamaguchi, taught during Spring Term 2016. I have taught this class regularly over the past thirty years but, since I was on sabbatical during the 2015-2016 academic year, Dr. Yamaguchi taught the class. It was her first time to teach this critical course in our department.

The two capstone courses in anthropology offer students an opportunity to demonstrate their accomplishments during their undergraduate careers and the key learning

outcome, understanding and articulating anthropological concepts and theories, is central to this task. Anthropological Theory utilizes written examinations, oral argument, and a research project as methods to accomplish this goal. While I was not able to monitor participation and oral argument, Dr. Yamaguchi has presented me with student research and examination papers in order to allow me to make an outside assessment of student outcomes.

These materials adequately demonstrate that most students in the class, based on the scoring criteria utilized by the department, exceeded expectations for the course, with a number of students performing exceptional work for the class. As expected, a few students fell into the acceptable and minimally acceptable range, and a couple of students turned in assignments judged to be unacceptable.

The document that outlines anthropology learning outcomes utilizes the following procedure, based on student performance, to assess course outcomes:

Scale:

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+)

After having read many of examination and research papers representing the full range of student work, it is clear that the course successfully provided the opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of core anthropological concepts and theories and provided students with multiple ways of articulating their knowledge of those theories and ideas. Her methods aligned with those I have used during previous years in the class and, clearly, students who took the course seriously were provided with a challenging learning opportunity. Their work demonstrates that the majority of the class rose to meet that challenge.

Dr. Yamaguchi utilized a well-respected collection of classical theoretical readings in anthropology to provide her students with an understanding of the development of anthropological theorizing over the past one-hundred-and-fifty years and supplemented those readings with more recent, theoretically-dense ethnographic works to offer students some indication of current theoretical directions within the field. Much as I have done in the past, she offered her students the opportunity to conduct fieldwork-grounded research projects that would deploy a recent theoretical approach for analysis, or allowed students to research classical theorists or schools of thought in greater depth for their research. In addition, students were offered take-home examinations that encouraged them to explore central concepts in depth from the materials that they had read.

Overall, Anthropological Theory provides students with more than one avenue to demonstrate that they both understand and are able to articulate, both orally and in

written form, central anthropological concepts and theories. Along with Social Organization, the alternate capstone course in anthropology, Anthropological Theory, gives students a substantial theoretical grounding in the field, allows them to understand the way in which the analysis of narratives and discourses and of social and culturally-contoured practices provide the mechanisms out of which logical theories of human actions may be developed, tested, and deployed.

Learning Outcomes Summary for Fall 2015-Spring 2016 ANTHROPOLOGY FACULTY RESPONSE

The faculty of the Anthropology Program met to review the assessment plan for the Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 terms. The reviews were of two upper division courses. The first of these was Anthropology 315, Forensic Anthropology, which was assessed to ascertain student success in the learning outcome to **“acquire research skills that include the acquisition, analysis, and synthesis of research materials in a report format”**. The second course was Anthropology 428, Anthropological Theory, which was assessed to measure the learning outcome to **“understand and articulate anthropological concepts and theories”**. The enrollments for these courses were 28 students (Forensic Anthropology) and 19 students (Anthropological Theory). 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 Forensic 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 Forensic 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 subset of the student papers, agreed that the course exceeded expectations with regard to the learning outcome of acquiring research skills that include the acquisition, analysis, and synthesis of research materials in a report format. In the second course, Anthropological Theory, Dr. Yamaguchi assessed that the course had exceeded expectations (4 on a scale of 5) in requiring students to understand and articulate anthropological concepts and theories. The second reviewer (Dr. Carucci) examined a sub-set of the exams and independently agreed that the course met or exceeded expectations with regard to the proposed learning outcomes.

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 research projects), 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 superficial nature of the paper and the use of dated or very limited sources. These flaws are typically associated with hastily prepared papers without allowing sufficient time to conduct the research and think about the topic.

Potential action items would include: (1) require students to select topics well in advance of the due date and (2) require students to 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 that were minimally acceptable revolves around the organization or structure of the paper (e.g., clear statements of the goals and the logic of the arguments) as well as the discussion of how the results are relevant to the broader class theme (e.g., forensic anthropology). While teaching basic writing is the purview of other departments, we should be able to assist students in identifying writing styles appropriate to the discipline. Potential action items could include: (1) requiring students to identify the structure of professional papers in terms of goals and supporting arguments and (2) offer greater instructor feedback as students design their research projects. This would enable them to incorporate writing structures from both readings and feedback that can improve their own writing. Our ability to implement these sorts of writing strategies would help students at the lower level of achievement move toward the goals of understanding and articulating complex anthropology concepts and developing them within the context of a research project.