

Academic Program Assessment Report

Academic Year(s) Assessed: 2024-2025

College: CLS

Department: Sociology & Anthropology

Department Head: Cody Warner

Submitted by: Craig Lee, Mike Neeley, Cody Warner (DH)

Program(s) Assessed

List all majors (including each option), minors, and certificates that are included in this assessment – add or subtract rows as needed – please use official titles:

Majors	Minors, Options, etc.
Anthropology	Anthropology

Section 1. Past Assessment Summary.

In the previous assessment cycle, the Anthropology Department was commended for its thoughtful evaluation of program needs amidst faculty turnover as well as for providing a robust methodology. However, reviewers also noted limited detail regarding data interpretation with the caveat that resulting curricular changes—which they observed were linked to the departure of tenure-track (TT) faculty—were also reflected by the department’s earnest intention to involve new hires in future program revisions. For context, there is a duality to the field of anthropology, with roughly half of its practitioners focused on primarily “physical” interests, e.g., anthropological archaeologists and biological anthropologists, and with the other half primarily interested in more “cultural” aspects, e.g., cultural anthropologists and linguistic anthropologists. At the end of the Spring 2023 term, we lost 100% of our culturally-focused anthropologists. Our reviewers recommended that we continue to identify ways to further “close the loop.” Our assessment provided a foundation for future program review and strategic planning, especially as the program continues to operate under reduced faculty capacity. (We are still down 50% from our decades long average.) This year’s assessment—focused on PLOs related to evolutionary principles and the human past—builds on the prior cycle by foregrounding continuity in learning goals despite staffing constraints and is in alignment with recommendations to better integrate with university long-term planning and 7-year review efforts.

Section 2. Institutional Assessment Data Request.

Based on the rationale on the Instructions page, please review your program learning outcomes (PLOs) and identify whether you have PLOs that address the Core Qualities. There are no right or wrong answers.

Identify 1-2 major-required courses that might have student assignments designed to meet these objectives at least at a surface level. If you cannot identify a course in your program that aligns with this request, please check the appropriate box. At this juncture, this is for information gathering as we plan future institutional assessment endeavors.

Core Quality LOs are Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO)	PLO overlaps with MSU	Beginning Level e.g. CORE Courses (US, W, Q, IN, CS, IA, IH, IS, D)	Developing Level	Proficient Level	Not Applicable (N/A)
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	Core Quality		e.g. list one 200- or 300-level course	e.g. list one 300- or 400-level courses, Capstone, Research (R) Core courses	No course exists in our program that addresses this Core Quality / ILO
Thinkers & Problem Solvers	X	Core classes are designed to address an introductory, foundational level of Core Qualities. Some may overlap into the developing level, but most intermediate-to-developing or proficient/mastery level courses will exist within the majors.	ANTY313	ANTY450R	
Effective Communicators	X		ANTY313	ANTY450R	
Local & Global Citizen	X		ANTY313	ANTY450R	

Section 3. Actionable Research Question for Your Assessment.

In support of our department's commitment to providing students with a comprehensive grounding in evolutionary theory and archaeological method—within a broader anthropological education that fosters critical thinking, cultural understanding, and scientific literacy—we focused on two aims for this cycle. First, can students meet the designated thresholds for the PLOs under consideration? And second, do we see a difference in assessment for courses that are archaeologically focused versus courses that are biologically focused?

Section 4. Assessment Plan, Schedule, and Data Sources.

Did you change the previously established Assessment Plan Schedule. If yes, how was it changed?

No

Please provide a multi-year assessment schedule that will show when all program learning outcomes will be assessed, and by what criteria (data). List your PLOs in full for reference. Add rows as necessary.

ASSESSMENT PLANNING SCHEDULE CHART					
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	Data Source
#1 Students will recognize and differentiate the diversity of human cultures and languages and the principles and methods that anthropologists employ for studying them.	X				Multiple Choice Exam Questions
#2 Students will identify the biological principles and historical contingencies that explain and govern the deep history of humanity as revealed by the findings of human paleontology and archaeology.	X	ANTY 350			Essay Exam
#3 Students will describe the fundamental laws and processes of heredity and evolution, and their implications for individuals and populations.		ANTY 313	X		Essay Exam
#4 Students will demonstrate knowledge of contemporary anthropological or archaeological theory.			X	X	Final Paper

#5 Students will demonstrate facility with critical thinking and cross-cultural competencies necessary for participation in today's globalized world.				X	Final Paper
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What are the threshold values for which your program demonstrates student achievement? Provide a rationale for your threshold values.

Threshold Values		
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	Threshold Value	Data Source
PLO #2 Students will identify the biological principles and historical contingencies that explain and govern the deep history of humanity as revealed by the findings of human paleontology and archaeology.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score above 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.	Randomly selected student essays
PLO #3 Students will describe the fundamental laws and processes of heredity and evolution, and their implications for individuals and populations.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score above 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.	Randomly selected student essays

Section 5. What Was Done?

Self-reporting Metric (required answer): Was the completed assessment consistent with the program's assessment plan? If not, please explain the adjustments that were made.

XX Yes

No

How was the data collected and analyzed and by whom? Please include method of collection and sample size.

The data was collected, scored and analyzed by Dr. Craig Lee. Dr. Michael Neeley also independently scored each sample.

For ANTY 350 (Old World Prehistory), all of the third exams, "Exam 3," submitted (N=23) were shared by the instructor and considered as artifacts. Of the 23, 21% (5 of 23) were randomly selected for evaluation using the above rubric. To select the sample, each exam was given a number and a random number generator was used to select the 5 in this sample.

For ANTY 313 (Biological Anthropology), all of the "Final Exams" submitted (N=32) were shared by the instructor and considered as artifacts. Of the 32, 25% (8 of 32) were randomly selected for evaluation using the above rubric. To select the sample, each exam was given a number and a random number generator was used to select the 8 in this sample.

Each of the artifacts for each PLO was read and scored for each category using the rubrics presented **below**. Every artifact was given a final overall score. These are presented in table form below.

Rubric for in-class essay evaluation. Threshold Values: 75% of students will meet or exceed Level 3 competency.

PLO #2 Students will identify the biological principles and historical contingencies that explain and govern the deep history of humanity as revealed by the findings of human paleontology and archaeology.
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PLO #3 Students will describe the fundamental laws and processes of heredity and evolution, and their implications for individuals and populations.				
	Level 1: Not yet competent	Level 2: Fairly Competent	Level 3: Highly Competent	Level 4: Sophisticated
Relevance & Comprehension	Response does not address key elements of the question or misinterprets major concepts.	Responds to most elements of the question, though some aspects may be underdeveloped or inaccurate.	Addresses all parts of the question with clear understanding and relevant examples.	Demonstrates comprehensive understanding with depth, precision, and insightful connections to course content.
Use of Evidence	Lacks specific evidence or examples; relies on generalizations or inaccurate references.	Includes some supporting evidence, though it may be limited or unevenly applied.	Uses appropriate examples, terminology, and evidence from readings or lectures to support key points.	Incorporates rich, well-chosen evidence effectively and accurately throughout the response.
Organization & Clarity	Ideas are disorganized or unclear; difficult to follow.	Organization is present but uneven; some clarity issues.	Clearly organized with logical flow; writing is generally clear and coherent.	Writing is concise, well-structured, and easy to follow; transitions and flow enhance the argument.

Section 6. What Was Learned.

Based on the analysis of the data, and compared to the threshold values established, what was learned from the assessment?

Essay prompt linked to PLO#2: Please answer the following questions about the Neanderthals: a. In what regions of the world and during what span of time did early Neanderthals live? b. What cranial and postcranial anatomical traits do Neanderthals display? How do Neanderthals differ anatomically from *Homo sapiens*? c. Please discuss what we know about Neanderthal culture. What are the important features of Neanderthal behavior? d. From the analysis of ancient DNA of Neanderthals and DNA of modern humans (*Homo sapiens*), what have we learned about the evolutionary relationship between the Neanderthals and modern humans?

Data Tables for ANTY 313 PLO #2 Students will identify the biological principles and historical contingencies that explain and govern the deep history of humanity as revealed by the findings of human paleontology and archaeology.

Topic	Essay 6	Essay 14	Essay 17	Essay 18	Essay 23	Essay 25	Essay 26	Essay 29	Overall
Relevance & Comprehension	L4	L4	L3	L4	L3/L4	L4	L3	L4	L4 (3.7)
Use of Evidence	L4	L3	L3	L4	L3	L4	L3	L4	L3/L4 (3.5)

Organization & Clarity	L3	L2/L3	L3	L2/L3	L3	L3/L4	L3	L4	L3 (3.1)
Overall	L4/ (3.7)	L3 (3.2)	L3 (3.0)	L3/L4 (3.5)	L3 (3.2)	L4 (3.8)	L3 (3.0)	L4 (4.0)	L3 (3.4)

Topic	Essay 6	Essay 14	Essay 17	Essay 18	Essay 23	Essay 25	Essay 26	Essay 29	Overall
Relevance & Comprehension	3.5	3.5	3.5	4	3.5	4	3.5	4	L4 (3.8)
Use of Evidence	3	3.5	3	4	3.5	4	2.5	4	L3 (3.4)
Organization & Clarity	3	3.5	3.5	4	3.5	3.5	3.5	4	L4 (3.6)
Overall	L3 (3.2)	L3/L4 (3.5)	L3 (3.3)	L4 (4.0)	L3/L4 (3.5)	L4 (3.8)	L3 (3.2)	L4 (4.0)	L4 (3.6)

A summary of the scores show all eight of the artifact answers at Level 3 or above. This puts 100% of the answers at Highly Competent or above.

Essay prompt linked to PLO#3: Zeder examines the changes in our understanding of the domestication process since 1995. What were the primary markers of domestication in 1995? From this, what was the consensus with regard to the timing location of the domestication of plants and animals? What sorts of changes have occurred since 1995 in terms of how we assess domestication? How has the picture of domestication changed since 1995 (look at plants and animals, timing, and location)?

Data Tables for ANTY 350 PLO #3 Students will describe the fundamental laws and processes of heredity and evolution, and their implications for individuals and populations.

	Essay 6	Essay 11	Essay 15	Essay 18	Essay 22	Overall
Relevance & Comprehension	L2/L3	L4	L3	L4	L4	L3/L4 (3.5)
Use of Evidence	L3	L4	L3	L4	L4	L4 (3.6)
Organization & Clarity	L2/L3	L4	L2/L3	L3	L4	L3 (3.2)
Overall	L3 (2.7)	L4 (4.0)	L3 (2.8)	L4 (3.7)	L4 (4.0)	L3 (3.4)

	Essay 6	Essay 11	Essay 15	Essay 18	Essay 22	Overall
Relevance & Comprehension	2.5	3.5	2.5	3.5	3.5	L3 (3.1)

Use of Evidence	2	3	2	3	3.5	L3 (2.7)
Organization & Clarity	2	4	2	3	4	L3 (3.0)
Overall	L2 (2.2)	L3/L4 (3.5)	L2 (2.2)	L3 (3.2)	L4 (3.7)	L3 (2.9)

A summary of the scores show three of the artifact answers at Level 3 or above with two at Level 2/3. This puts 60% of the answers at Highly Competent or above and 40% at Fairly Competent/Highly Competent.

What areas of strength in the program were identified from this assessment process?

Assessment of PLO #2 through artifacts from ANTY 313 (Biological Anthropology) demonstrated strong student performance, with 100% of the sampled essays scoring at Level 3 (Highly Competent) or higher across all evaluated categories. This includes consistently high marks in Relevance & Comprehension, Use of Evidence, and Organization & Clarity, with many students approaching or attaining Level 4 (Sophisticated) proficiency. Students in this biologically focused course are effectively engaging with the material, demonstrating a solid grasp of human paleontology, Neanderthal culture and anatomy, and evolutionary relationships—core components of PLO #2. The relatively even performance across all rubric categories also points to successful integration of content knowledge with analytical and communication skills. In contrast, PLO #3, assessed via ANTY 350 (Old World Prehistory), an archaeologically focused course, fell slightly below the overall program threshold of 75%, with 60% of students scoring at Level 3 or above. Of note, however, the remaining 40% were just below the mark (at Level 2/3). While scores were more variable for PLO #3, students showed relatively strong abilities in using evidence and articulating evolutionary change over time, indicating that even with the more complex material, many were capable of applying evolutionary principles thoughtfully.

What areas were identified that either need improvement or could be improved in a different way from this assessment process?

While both courses met or approached the program's assessment thresholds, the data suggest areas for potential improvement in courses like ANTY 350, particularly regarding organization and clarity and consistent application of supporting evidence. Some students had difficulty structuring their answers clearly or integrating evidence in a sustained and coherent way, leading to mid-level scores (e.g., 2.2–3.0 range) despite understanding the core concepts. These trends were more pronounced in the archaeologically oriented ANTY 350 course, which may reflect students' uneven comfort levels with interpreting scientific literature or articulating abstract processes in writing. While not directly tied to the PLOs themselves, challenges in written expression could still hinder demonstration of competency.

Section 7. How We Responded.

Describe how "What Was Learned" was communicated to the department, or program faculty. How did faculty discussions re-imagine new ways program assessment might contribute to program growth/improvement/innovation beyond the bare minimum of achieving program learning objectives through assessment activities conducted at the course level?

The results were discussed by the two remaining TT faculty. While we believe this was a useful exercise, in light of the current program bottleneck (loss of 50% of the TT faculty as noted

above), we are interested in: 1) getting a new hire (or hires) in place, and then 2) practicing intentional inclusivity with our new colleague(s) to set any major new course(s) of action.

How are the results of this assessment informing changes to enhance student learning in the program?

We plan to target PLO #3 “Students will describe the fundamental laws and processes of heredity and evolution, and their implications for individuals and populations” again in 25-26 assessment with artifacts from ANTY 313 via a similarly complex essay. We will also encourage students to utilize writing support resources. A year-over-year evaluation of this PLO will provide an opportunity for longitudinal tracking of student performance as it relates to both content knowledge and written communication.

If information outside of this assessment is informing programmatic changes, please describe that.

N/A

What support and resources (e.g., workshops, training, etc.) might you need to make these adjustments?

None that we can think of at the current time.

Section 8. Closing the Loop(s).

Reflect on the program learning outcomes, how they were assessed in the previous cycle (refer to #1 of the report), and what was learned in this cycle about any actions stemming from the previous cycle.

- a) **Self-Reporting Metric (required answer): Based on the findings and/or faculty input, will there be any changes made (such as plans for measurable improvements, realignment of learning outcomes, curricular changes, etc.) in preparation for upcoming assessments?**

Yes

No

- b) **In reviewing the last report that assessed the PLO(s) in this assessment cycle, what changes proposed were implemented and will be measured in future assessment reports? What action will be taken to improve student learning objectives going forward?**

Our previous cycle emphasized writing challenges, particularly among non-majors. While we stopped short of embedding writing instruction directly into course content, instructors responded by stating expectations for written clarity in assignment prompts. This cycle’s performance in ANTY 350—where most students demonstrated conceptual understanding but received mid-level scores due to structural or organizational issues—suggests that more direct interventions may be needed. It’s also important to note that our artifacts this cycle were “time constrained” writing examples from in-class exams, which proceed under different circumstances than take home essays or class papers.

- c) **Have you seen a change in student learning based on other program adjustments made in the past? Please describe the adjustments made and subsequent changes in student learning.**

In prior years, assessment of major-only courses such as ANTY 450 showed high achievement in both content knowledge and written expression. The performance data from this cycle reaffirms that students in biologically focused upper-division courses (e.g., ANTY 313) – likely major-only –

continue to demonstrate strong comprehension and organization across all rubric categories. While some of this may stem from cumulative learning and better retention among majors, we also attribute improved outcomes to our deliberate efforts in assignment design and reinforcement of analytical standards in class. These incremental changes—though modest—appear to be helping students better integrate theoretical knowledge with written communication.

- d) **If the program sees anything emerging from this assessment cycle that it anticipates would be a factor or an item of discussion in its 7-year program review cycle, please use this space to document that for future reference.**

As noted, we remain in a serious state of flux with 50% of our tenure-track faculty gone (100% of our socially focused faculty). We are optimistic that we might be authorized for a search in the next cycle. Staying our current course, which included input from socially focused colleagues when we were last a full department, seems to be the most responsible and pragmatic action in the interim. However, the long-term impacts of faculty attrition may become more evident in future assessment cycles, particularly if course coverage or methodological diversity becomes overly reliant on the two remaining TT faculty. We anticipate this issue—along with the integration of discipline-specific writing skills—would merit further discussion in the 7-year review.

Submit report to programassessment@montana.edu

Update Department program assessment report website.

Update PLO language in CIM if needed ([Map PLOs to Course LOs](#))