

## **Department of Anthropology: Assessment of BA and BS Programs**

**University of Arkansas, Spring 2016**

The Anthropology Department at the University of Arkansas presently offers two degree programs to undergraduate students—the BA (Bachelor of Arts), and the BS (Bachelor of Science). Because anthropology is equally humanistic and scientific in orientation and scope, the courses constituting the BA and BS degrees provide undergraduates valuable creative and analytic thinking tools. They also impart relevant research, observation and writing skills, while broadening students' "real world" understandings of human culture and bio-cultural diversity on local, regional, national and international scales, from the distant past to the immediate present. The Department is committed to training students how best to examine the past, present, and future human condition with discipline and ingenuity.

Courses in cultural anthropology offer introductory and advanced exposure to Native American, Latin American, African, and Middle Eastern Studies; they focus on key approaches including visual anthropology and ethnographic documentation of expressive culture and performance. Globalization and diasporic movements are emphasized alongside emerging transnational identities and religiosity, borderlands studies, human rights, conflict, resistance, gender, and social movements. Biological anthropology courses emphasize human origins, evolution, adaptation and behavioral ecology; hominid (fossil) analysis including dental science and micro-wear, primatology, morphometric analysis and biomechanics. Archaeology courses include advanced GIS (Global Information Systems) and remote sensing and prospecting in landscape archaeology, analysis of ancient human settlement patterns and cultural resource management; they articulate with several biological anthropology courses vis-à-vis paleopathology, osteology, and forensics; offerings span Native American, Mesoamerican and Old World cultures, including Neolithic (stone-age) tool and ceramics analysis, and courses covering advanced laboratory techniques in cartography and digital image analysis. Each semester, our faculty develops new courses bridging subfields of anthropology: medical anthropology and ecological anthropology, for example, are taught each semester, encouraging anthropology majors to forge meaningful linkages between various schools of thought in the field.

The University of Arkansas' undergraduate anthropology curriculum has remained relatively stable since 2012 when the BA and BS programs were last revised. The number of anthropology undergraduate majors at UA has leveled off to around 230. This number has fluctuated between 200 and 400 over the last five years, yet recruitment efforts are ongoing within the department. Our faculty endeavors to ensure that undergraduates are provided ample diversity in course offerings each semester. Both the BA and the BS programs are "capped" by a senior

seminar, ANTH 4013 (History of Anthropological Thought), which synthesizes the major works of leading anthropologists; the course also fulfills the Fulbright writing requirement and allows undergraduates an arena to extend and advance their own intellectual orientations. This capstone course is generative and rigorous, and provides BA and BS students the “toolkit” required to grasp relevant theoretical movements, research and analysis skills essential to succeed in academic and applied anthropology today.

To assess the undergraduate programs’ relative success in preparing students for careers in academic anthropology or applied anthropology and beyond, three focus groups were consulted (n = 14) in preparation for the current assessment. Two groups were comprised of BA students (n = 9) and the remaining five were BS students. All were asked to speak candidly and freely with the vice-chair about their unique experiences and impressions of the program, and to comment on perceived strengths and drawbacks relative to their academic preparation and enrichment. Several key “themes” emerged and have been culled and are highlighted below for the anthropology BA and BS degrees. Data collected in the focus group sessions revealed aspects of the department’s curricular strengths while addressing areas where improvement may be needed.

### **Anthropology BA Program**

The BA program requires 35 hours of anthropology credit hours beyond the Fulbright Core, and is designed to provide comprehensive training in cultural anthropology, biological anthropology, and archaeology. The BA is a fundamentally “liberal arts” degree by its very nature, and accordingly it seeks to develop creative documentation, documentation and analysis of human cultural life, while advanced descriptive and expository writing skills to serve students beyond their undergraduate experience. The core courses for the BA consist of the following fourteen hours:

ANTH 1023: Introduction to Cultural ANTH

ANTH 1013/1011: Introduction to Biological Anthropology and Lab

ANTH 1033/1031: Introduction to Archaeology and Lab

ANTH 4013: History of Anthropological Thought

To maximize exposure to the breadth of anthropology, students are also required to complete one upper-level course in each of the three subfields, such as Historical Archaeology, Human Evolution, and Anthropology of Religion. The BA also requires that students complete two courses covering two different geographic areas, such as North American Prehistory and

Egyptology; others chose Power and Protest in Latin America and Women of Africa, to illustrate. Finally, two remaining anthropology courses of any level or subfield are required for the BA. Students appreciate the depth of exposure this requirement has contributed to their training. They also value the opportunity to “specialize” in any of the three subfields by concentrating their electives in archaeology, biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, and/or cartography/GIS/remote sensing.

### **Anthropology BS Program**

The BS program in anthropology requires 29 hours of anthropology credits beyond the Fulbright core, plus 26 additional hours of courses in mathematics (one calculus course and one statistics course is typical) and any of the natural sciences such as biology, chemistry, and geology. The BS is designed for students with interests in the science of anthropology, including human health, medicine, dental science, paleopathology, bio-archaeology, medical anthropology, and any number of related social health research directives. The courses comprising the BS emphasize data-driven approaches and advanced mathematical modeling, hardware/software skills, digital imaging and other empirical modes of inquiry into human evolution, adaptation, and survival. The BS degree provides a distinctly human approach to training undergraduates seeking careers in medical sciences and dentistry, as well as those on pathways toward graduate-level studies in any area arena of biological anthropology, applied medical anthropology, forensics, and criminalistics. Core courses for the BS include:

ANTH 1023: Introduction to Cultural ANTH

ANTH 1013/1011: Introduction to Biological Anthropology and Lab

ANTH 1033/1031: Introduction to Archaeology and Lab

ANTH 4013: History of Anthropological Thought

BS majors are also required to complete five courses, or fifteen hours, or courses numbered 3000 or higher for the degree. A minimum of six hours of mathematics/statistics courses is required beyond College Algebra, in addition to 20 hours of science courses chosen from Biology, Chemistry, Geology, and/or Physics. BS students in pursuit of health-related careers are encouraged to choose biology courses such as Human Physiology, Principles of Zoology, Evolutionary Biology, Cell Physiology, Comparative Vertebrate Morphology, Immunology, and Organic Chemistry, to achieve the fullest possible portrait of the human condition from a scientific approach.

## **Undergraduate Feedback and Priorities**

Students consulted in focus groups identified several key strengths of the BA and BS programs, primarily strong topical articulation with other UA programs of study: Latin American Studies, Religious Studies, Africana Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Middle Eastern Studies were all mentioned during group sessions. Students appreciate the opportunity to collaborate and “cross-pollinate” between research programs of anthropology faculty members and those in other program and departments. Many vocalized enthusiasm for the department’s diverse social, cultural, and geographic course coverage. Others cited highly favorable and rewarding experiences with faculty mentors and thesis supervisors, particularly those whose labs offered hands-on training with state-of-the-art facilities. A few students expressed desire for more bio-cultural and health-related courses in anthropology; the prospect of taking seminars in food security, agro-diversity, subsistence and sustainability were mentioned eagerly in one instance. Applied anthropology, often considered to be another “subfield” of anthropology, was also discussed openly by students who wish to broaden their knowledge of how best to apply their training to real-life problems. Archaeological field schools, especially the spring field session sponsored by the Arkansas Archaeological Survey, were pinpointed favorably. Others discussed the benefit of participating in excavations in other regions of the state of Arkansas, while others highlighted the value of internships at local museums in Northwest Arkansas. Study-abroad opportunities were cited favorably, yet many were unsure of how to choose a field school germane to their interests.

The Department of Anthropology at UA is now strong in all sub-disciplines of the field, and our undergraduates stand to benefit accordingly. Since 2012, we have hired two cultural anthropologists (Dr. Jonathan Marion and Dr. Ram Natarajan), one biological anthropologist (Dr. Claire Terhune), and two new archaeologists (Dr. Wesley Stoner and Dr. Benjamin Vining). All of these scholars, in addition to existing tenured and clinical faculty, contribute substantively to our undergraduate programs. The department is well-positioned to develop existing strengths while accommodating intellectual priorities of students. Intra-departmental collaborations must continue to flourish in ways that will best serve the needs of undergraduates at the University of Arkansas.