Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science in Anthropology

Department of Anthropology and Sociology

College of Arts and Sciences

2014 Review

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Executive Summary

The academic discipline of Anthropology is of crucial importance for students in today’s world because it is the only discipline that studies the human species from a holistic perspective. WCU’s Anthropology Program is distinctive for its balance of regional engagement with a global perspective. The Anthropology Program has been a model for WCU’s recently formalized engaged approach and is systematically aligned with the 2020 Plan. We have been actively working to connect our program’s strategic direction to that of the College and the University. Our curriculum has been systematically revised over the past several years to provide a more well-rounded approach to all of the sub-disciplines of Anthropology, and to reduce redundancies. We have also instituted an Engaged Learning Experience requirement for all of our majors. Our faculty are nationally and internationally known scholars who are also friendly and accessible teachers and advisors who provide students with opportunities for personal and professional growth both inside and outside of the classroom. We have over 150 majors in our Anthropology Program. They consistently present their work at regional and national conferences, and otherwise participate in a range of engagement activities, while also focusing on our rigorously organized courses. Our administrative structure has been re-oriented in recent years to a “rotating chair” model, which has worked well to involve more faculty in departmental administration and administrative professional development. Our facilities and budgets have improved in recent years, but our Forensic Osteological Research Station (FOREST) needs a significant upgrade to support the high-profile teaching and research that takes place there.
Standard 1: The purpose of the program reflects and supports the mission and strategic
vision of Western Carolina University and the College of Arts and Sciences

Anthropology is the study of the human species. Traditionally this study is divided into
four subfields: cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, archaeology, and linguistic
anthropology. These subfields cover the range of human existence: human society or culture;
human biology; human prehistory and material culture; and human language use. One
fundamental feature of anthropology is its holistic approach, viewing the human species from all
directions and dimensions: behavior, biology, past, present, and future.

The program’s purpose supports the broader strategic vision and mission of Western
Carolina University as detailed in the 2020 Plan (see Appendix A). The faculty are dedicated to
an approach to student learning and engagement that is conducive to the personal and intellectual
growth of its students. The program is a resource for the region through its focus on cultural
resource management and forensic anthropological consultancy. The academic program is home
to three applied research laboratories: Forensic Anthropology, Archaeology, and Ethnography.
These laboratories allow high-quality faculty research in which students gain firsthand
experience in conducting anthropological research through work study, independent and directed
study, or salaried laboratory assistantships.

Undergraduate degree programs in anthropology are offered at all the major institutions
within the University of North Carolina System. The primary strength of our program is that it
offers our students several benefits not available at larger or smaller institutions within the
system:

- A faculty dedicated to undergraduate teaching;
- A faculty large enough to offer a diversity of course options but small enough to provide one-on-one interaction within and outside the classroom; and
- Faculty recognized for their scholarly activity and connected to ongoing research through the program’s laboratory facilities. Our students directly benefit from this through real life examples and through opportunities to work side by side with faculty in their research.

**Standard 2: The program engages in ongoing, systematic planning that is reflective of the University’s strategic priorities.**

University guidelines provide for periodic program review. The last Academic Program Review took place in 2006, and a review under the Program Prioritization process occurred last year (2013). Additionally, the program has been very involved in combining its department-level strategic plan with that of the College of Arts and Sciences, and with WCU’s 2020 Plan (see Appendix B). Indeed, our primary goal as a program is to integrate our vision and mission with that of the college and the university in order to achieve positive outcomes for our students. Our process for developing and modifying our goals and objectives involves faculty consultations and visioning through departmental-level meetings and correspondence, and ongoing work to connect those visions to the broader themes of the college and university. The department head is primarily responsible for implementing specific program goals and objectives. A number of goals were also identified by the previous Academic Program Review to be achieved--or at least acted upon--within five years, and program strengths and weaknesses were identified in the Program Prioritization process. These three strategic goals were identified in the previous Academic Program Review: 1) curriculum development; 2) use of space; and 3) budgetary issues.
The anthropology program responded to the first goal by making a number of changes to our curriculum to meet student needs. We combined similar introductory-level courses that were being offered separately as requirements in the majors and as Perspective courses in the Liberal Studies program. We added required sub-disciplinary electives in the major and expanded our offerings to include coursework in all sub-disciplinary areas. We added in minimum-grade on a gateway course in the Forensic Anthropology Concentration (ANTH 264: Human Osteology). Finally, we also added an Engaged Learning Experience requirement for all program graduates (see Standard 3).

We responded to the second goal by securing additional space in the McKee Building for program faculty and students through WCU’s Space Planning process. After demonstrating the need for additional space, we expanded our Western Carolina Human Identification Laboratory and our Archaeology Laboratory, we added a teaching laboratory dedicated to instruction and student research in the forensic anthropology concentration, we added new faculty offices (including a dedicated office for the director of the Forensic Anthropology Program), and we added a student lounge with lockers. This move also opened space for other faculty offices, so that currently all concerns about lack of space identified in previous strategic planning have been addressed. However, storage space will soon be a problem again as more donor skeletons are curated.

We responded to the third goal by securing additional funding for teaching and research through the newly instituted budget-hearing process. This process allowed us to increase our Education and Technology funding dramatically, and also to purchase laboratory equipment and supplies. Although our departmental budget remains tight, we are currently meeting the needs of our faculty and students.
Standard 3. The program provides and evaluates a high quality curriculum that emphasizes student learning as its primary purpose.

The anthropology program recently re-organized its curriculum to streamline the amount of time needed to complete the curriculum, put more emphasize student learning, and follow accepted disciplinary standards (see Appendix C). The program was streamlined by combining our ANTH 110 and ANTH 250 courses, as well as our ANTH 120 and ANTH 260 courses. These were “mirror” courses taught in both the Liberal Studies (ANTH 110, 120) and Anthropology major and minor (ANTH 250, 260) curricula. Previously we have been hesitant to combine these courses because the 250 and 260 courses, along with ANTH 341, provided a core set of classes that students majoring in the discipline could take together as cohorts. Other changes to the curriculum made this type of academic team-building no longer necessary.

In addition to stream-lining the introductory courses, working through our departmental curriculum committee we also added a series of perspectives categories that reflect the sub-disciplinary perspective of the field of anthropology: sociocultural and linguistic, archaeology, and bioanthropology. All majors will now be required to take at least one elective in each of these categories. The forensic anthropology curricula were also streamlined, by removing one required class (ANTH 401). The required Human Osteology course (ANTH 364) was also renumbered at the 200-level so that students in that concentration might take it earlier in their coursework. This change also puts more emphasis on the importance of this key course within the forensic anthropology concentration. A number of courses that had been taught as “special topics” courses (ANTH 493) were brought into the curriculum as regular classes. Finally, we added an Engaged Learning Experience requirement for all anthropology majors, which clearly orients our program to the mission of WCU as a Carnegie Foundation institution focused on
community engagement. This new requirement also re-emphasizes our long-term commitment to summer field and travel courses, which include archaeology and forensic anthropology field-schools, as well as summer travel courses to Africa and Europe.

Despite these changes, students will still be able to finish their programs in the same amount of time (36 hours) and we will be able to offer more Liberal Studies sections than we have in the past. We also formalized our relationship with the Native American Studies program, allowing our majors and minors to take NAS courses as part of the program electives. Given our already strong connections to Sociology, Forensic Science, Cherokee Studies, and International Studies, we feel that this formalized connection will allow us to build on our already-strong interdisciplinary links. Now that this new—and we think long-lasting—curriculum is in place, we plan to tie course outcomes more directly on our syllabi to expected student-learning outcome. This will also allow us to orient our in-class testing to those expected student-learning outcomes, which will then provide information about future curricular decision-making. This change should help the program to work more closely with the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness to assess learning outcomes.

**Standard 4. The program has sufficient faculty resources to meet its mission and goals.**

Our faculty are well-qualified teacher-scholars with national reputations. We have an adequate number of faculty to teach our new curriculum, although we would like to add an additional tenure-track line in bioanthropology to support the Forensic Anthropology Program. All of our regular faculty hold terminal degrees from accredited institutions with strong reputations in anthropology (Chapel Hill, Georgia, Arizona, The Ohio State University). Our faculty also strongly represent each of the represented sub-disciplines in our program: sociocultural, biological, and archaeology. We recently completed a search to replace Dr.
Mwanki, an environmental anthropologist, and have made an offer to an internationally known environmental anthropologist with deep roots in the Southern Appalachian region, although a contract has not been signed at the time of writing this report.

All of our regular faculty (three women and two men, all of Euro-American ancestry) are tenured. Our faculty are active researchers who are steadily progressing in their professional development. They regularly present research at national meetings, and in peer-reviewed journals. They are also deeply engaged with our students and the local community, working to make their research activities relevant to the region. WCU provides various resources for professional development, and our faculty have used those to maintain their ongoing scholarly productivity. Most notably, Dr. Cheryl Johnston was recently awarded the status of Diplomate of the American Board of Forensic Anthropology. This makes our program the only under-graduate focused Forensic Anthropology program in the country with two board certified forensic anthropologists. Our program is notable for its collegiality, with faculty members working on shared research projects (e.g. mortuary analysis) and otherwise equitably sharing work. Our faculty are annually reviewed under a systematic process that is encoded in our Departmental Collegial Review Document, which has been regularly updated and clarified based on faculty input (see Appendix D).

**Standard 5. The program attracts, retains, and graduates high quality students.**

The Anthropology program has worked hard to attract students not only from among the undergraduate population at WCU, but nationally (and even internationally), particularly because of our well-regarded forensic anthropology program. Over the past several years we have been between the third and fifth largest program in the college in terms of numbers of majors, with over 150 students currently majoring in Anthropology (see Appendix E). There are no entry
requirements for our program. We retain these students because of our strong student-focus among all of our faculty members (advising is a strength and it is shared equally), and we graduate them with a high-quality educational experience because of our strong courses and engagement activities. In the Forensic Anthropology concentration more than 80% of applicants to graduate school are accepted. Our students are diverse, particularly in terms of gender, and we try to be open and accommodating to all. We had an explosive growth in our student population beginning in 2004—as a result of the establishment of our Forensic Anthropology program—and this flood of students did cause some growing pains: some faculty were feeling overworked and teaching resources were not always available. In the past two years the growth of our student population has leveled off, and our allocation of teaching resources has also increased, which has allowed us to reach a balance-point. We look forward to slow and steady growth and an increasing focus on attracting even higher-quality students in the near future. We monitor academic progress through required advising sessions on the campus-wide advising day, as well as through drop-in advising sessions. We have also instituted a new Engaged Learning Experience requirement for all graduates, and this should increase student retention even more.

**Standard 6. The program has an administrative structure that facilitates achievement of program goals and objectives.**

The Anthropology program has one full-time (12 month, one course release per year) Forensic Anthropology Program Director, and two other administrative positions that are currently held by Anthropology program faculty: Department of Anthropology and Sociology Department Head (10 month, one course release per semester) and Cherokee Studies Program Director (one course release per semester). Additionally, the Cherokee Language Program Director is a term appointee who teaches one course per semester in the Anthropology Program.
In the past year our DCRD has been revised to provide a system for annually evaluating all of these program directors. The specific procedure for the annual evaluation of the Department Head—as well as the appointment of that position on a “rotating chair” model—is also detailed in our DCRD. The department put this procedure into practice this year, successfully undertaking a department-head transition during the third year of the three year term of the current department head, Philip E. (Ted) Coyle. Dr. Kathleen Brennan, a sociologist in the department, has been appointed as incoming department head. There are no specific program-level training mechanisms in place for administrators, but WCU and the UNC system sponsor a series of trainings and workshops.

The department each year votes to fill its Annual Faculty Evaluation/Tenure and Promotion Committees. This committee examines required documentation concerning the effective completion of teaching, research, and service expectations for departmental faculty. They consider a self-report, a peer-review of teaching, and Student Assessments of Instruction as part of their annual review process and make written assessment of each faculty member’s annual performance. These assessments are then used by the department head to complete the official annual evaluation of each faculty member in the department. Our process also allows a faculty member to respond to that evaluation, and this response is included in their employment file.

In addition to compensated administrators, the department has standing Assessment and Curriculum Committees, as well as ad hoc committees related to internationalization and webpage maintenance. These are comprised based on a procedure detailed in the DCRD. Student input on program decisions is solicited informally; they are not included in standing committees. Alumni have no structured role in program decision-making, but nonetheless have been
importantly involved, as for example in the recent cadaver-dog training courses, which is led by a program alum.

**Standard 7. The program has adequate resources to meet its goals and objectives.**

The Anthropology Program is associated with several laboratories and research facilities, most famously its Forensic Anthropology Program facilities, the FOREST (Forensic Anthropology Research Station) and the WCHIL (Western Carolina Human Identification Laboratory). Additionally the program houses an Archaeology Laboratory, which includes a storeroom of artifacts resulting from regional excavations, and an Ethnography Laboratory, which is simply office space that is shared with the Cherokee Language Revival Program. The WCHIL and Archaeology Laboratory recently expanded into the space on the ground floor of the McKee Building vacated by the Social Work Program, which moved to the new Health and Human Services Building. This expansion added a teaching laboratory (G13) associated with the WCHIL, as well as a work-room and library associated with the Archaeology Laboratory. Drs. Williams, Johnston, and Eastman were also provided with new office space, which opened up space in their laboratories, where their offices were formerly located.

Despite this expansion, there are still a number of improvements that should be made to these facilities, as well as additional space needs that would be easy to meet given current configurations. Most crucially, the FOREST needs to be fenced around its entire perimeter, and the currently fenced human decomposition facility needs to be expanded. Additionally, the FOREST needs a dedicated building with office and work space, as well as bathrooms, to facilitate the very active research program there. The dedicated building should include a maceration lab and cold storage (so that donated bodies do not have to be delivered to and stored in McKee). Importantly, the building should have a classroom. Kennels and parking area need to
be added to facilitate the Cadaver Dog Training Courses. Additionally, on the ground floor of the McKee Building there are several unoccupied offices that during the space planning process were assigned to the departments of Modern Foreign Languages and History, but which are not used. These offices could be used for ongoing Forensic Anthropology research projects, and so allow more space for the processing of human remains in the WCHIL. Computers that are currently in our biohazard area in G15 could be set up in these offices so that projects involving special software can be carried out without the student sitting in a biohazard area. In general, we need to take measures to keep biohazard apart from public areas and non-biohazards projects.

Program staffing needs are currently being met, with the exception of the Forensic Anthropology Program, which has grown to the point of needing an additional tenure-track faculty member. In addition to the (biologically focused) forensic anthropology faculty members (two tenured professors and a lecturer), currently there are two archaeologically focused faculty members, and two socio-culturally focused faculty members (including our replacement for Dr. Mwaniki, who retired at the end of the Fall, 2012 semester). The Cherokee Language Program Director also provides linguistic expertise to the faculty. Several of these faculty members have course releases to complete their administrative assignments, but these does not seem to have impacted program needs.

Instructional technology is also adequate to support program needs. The Anthropology Program has in the past two years received increasing Education and Technology funding from the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Forensic Anthropology Program has used this and other funding to purchase a number of human skeletons, as well as bone casts and other osteologically related teaching materials. The college has also supported the program through the purchase of a high-powered digital microscope. This funding has also allowed the laboratories
and summer field-schools, which are associated with these laboratories, to refresh their equipment and supplies.

The regular office budget for the department is low, as is typical for departments in the college (see Appendix F). Still, funding is sufficient to provide faculty with $600 per year in travel funding (easily augmented through the Chancellor’s Travel Fund), and the very heavy printing expense is subsidized by the university. The department also enjoys a Development Fund, which several faculty members contribute to out of their monthly paychecks, and this provides an additional source of funding for faculty searches, student activities, and other occasional expenses.