

## ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR THE SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY MAJOR

2015-16

### **AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY STATEMENT**

As noted in last year's report, the major has implemented a greater incremental structure for the major. As noted, this structure starts with both of the major's introductory courses, then methods and theory courses, area study courses, internships and OCS courses. We are still in the process of updating and revising course syllabi to reflect goals, objectives, and means of assessment. Our major effort for this assessment report is to give provide some specific detail on that process of updating, assessing, and revising **specific courses** taught this past academic year by Professors Renfrow and Olson Note: Professor McClusky has been on sabbatical for the 2015-16 academic year).

### **ANNUAL ASSESSMENT MEETING**

Professors Renfrow and Olson met twice during finals week to discuss annual assessment. These meetings included discussion of our plan to provide a basic summary of our assessment of each individual course.

### **EXAMINATION OF ASSESSMENT DATA (COURSE BY COURSE) & PROPOSED CHANGES TO INDIVIDUAL COURSES**

#### SOC 151 Principles of Sociology (CAR)

Principles of Sociology serves as a gateway course for the major. During the Fall semester, 21 students completed this course. Since it is an introductory course, it is designed to meet program goals 1 (to develop informed critical scholars who can communicate in the language of sociology and anthropology) and 3 (to open students' eyes to structural injustices and develop an appreciation for diverse lifeways and to allow students the opportunity to think about creating a more just, equitable and sustainable society). Six biweekly quizzes and two exams with objective questions permitted Professor Renfrow to assess students' mastery of major concepts. Table 1 presents class averages for these quizzes and exams and indicates that students did quite well overall. They are intended to be relatively easy for students regularly attending class and keeping up with readings. That students did particularly poorly on the content of quiz 4 is surprising and indicates the need to spend more time on that material. A short empirical paper and roundtable presentation permitted him to assess program goal 3. This assignment asked students to explore a sociological issue from either a theoretical or applied perspective. Several faculty members and senior students attended the presentations. Their feedback suggests that students were by

and large successful; however, Professor Renfrow will collect more thorough assessment data in the future.

*Table 1. Class averages for Quizzes and Exams*

Quiz 1	Quiz 2	Quiz 3	Quiz 4	Quiz 5	Quiz 6	Exam 1
76	84	84	64	88	88	78

### ANTH 161 Introduction to Anthropology (CAR)

Like Principles of Sociology, Introduction to Anthropology, taught by Professor Olson, serves as a gateway course for the major. During the Fall 2015 semester, 38 students completed this course and 14 students completed the course in the Spring of 2016. Introduction to Anthropology, as an introductory course, shares with Principles to Sociology a design to meet program goal 1 (to develop informed critical scholars who can communicate in the language of sociology and anthropology). Introduction to Anthropology introduces students for the four subfields of anthropology as a way to gain a critical approach to the study of culture. Three quizzes, two exams, two problem-solution papers, and a cultural event review were the means of assessing the success in reaching program goal number one. A kinship project required students to interview a classmate allowed for an assessment of basic social science research skills and competence in a key area of anthropological research. Two problem-solution papers that required research on a chosen culture and the application of social science models for possible solutions to major issues (such as language loss, climate change, social injustice) are designed to meet program goal 4 to allow students the opportunity to think about creating a more just, equitable and sustainable society. A qualitative assessment of exams and the two problem-solution papers indicates a need to encourage improvement in basic library research skills and better utilization of theoretical models from applied anthropology. Assessment of course evaluations indicates that students are most likely to state that the most important thing they learned from the course was an appreciation of cultural diversity and a knowledge of anthropological research methods. A primary goal for Professor Olson for Fall 2016 is to do a better job of clarifying and articulating course goals and objectives in course materials and the better assessing these goals and objectives.

### SOC 228 Social Problems (CML)

Social Problems also serves as a gateway course for the major. During the Spring semester, 19 students completed this course. It is designed to meet program goals 1 (to develop informed critical scholars who can communicate in the language of sociology and anthropology) and 3 (to open students' eyes to structural injustices and develop an appreciation for diverse lifeways and to allow students the opportunity to think about creating a more just, equitable and sustainable

society). Student were assessed through three essays (with opportunity to revise one at the end of the semester for an improved grade), class participation, and discussion facilitation. One essay assignment explicitly took an applied approach and asked students “to engage in public sociology by writing a letter to a community leader (e.g., politician, school superintendent, teacher) proposing your vision for how we should educate young people about sex and sexuality. What should sexual education look like? Use your sociological knowledge to make an informed recommendation.” Several students reported actually sending their letters to the named legislator or school official. The course’s current focus on social problems of the body (eg, obesity, HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy and sexuality, etc.) is intended to serve Health Science majors. The course also fulfills the Crafting Meaningful Lives requirement and focuses on writing issues. Professor Renfrow facilitated two discussions concerning “meaningful lives,” the first designed to have students define what that means and the second at the conclusion of the semester to connect our conversations about social problems to these definitions. The course incorporated opportunities for students to give and receive feedback on writing assignments prior to submitting them to Professor Renfrow. Early drafts of the papers were plagued with common writing problems (eg, macro issues such as poor organization, weak or missing thesis statements, poor links between claims and support/evidence; micro issues such as run-on sentences, passive constructions). The papers consistently showed signs for improvement on both fronts from first draft to final revision. Students commented that the peer evaluations were helpful. Future students might benefit from additional class time spent on specific writing issues.

### ANTH 250 Hawaii (LGI)

During the Fall semester, 29 students completed this course taught by Professor Olson. It is designed to meet program goals 1 (to develop informed critical scholars who can communicate in the language of sociology and anthropology) and 3 (to open students’ eyes to structural injustices and develop an appreciation for diverse lifeways and to allow students the opportunity to think about creating a more just, equitable and sustainable society). The focus on one culture, from pre-Western contact to the present-day is designed to encourage students to consider the complexity of culture contact, assimilation, resistance, loss, and survival; this focus facilitates the opportunity to assess students’ abilities to consider the complexity of culture and its connections from the local to the global. In addition, the course allows for an assessment of the progress students are making as they move beyond the introductory level sociology and anthropology courses and engage with higher-level material on anthropological method and theory. Students are required to complete two literature review assignments, two response papers, two opportunities to lead class discussion for 10-15 minutes, and a final problem-solution paper. Class participation is strongly encouraged and counts as 10 of the total course grade. The literature review assignments and response papers all provide data for assessment of skills of communication in the language of anthropology and abilities to use anthropology to assess issues of justice, equity, and sustainability. The problem-solution paper provides a means of assessing students’ ability to synthesize course material and apply it to possible real-world solutions.

Course evaluations typically note the many ways in which the student has gained a critical awareness of the injustices of American colonialism, militarism, and tourism and gained an appreciation of the cultural diversity as found in the Hawaiian Islands. Student evaluations also felt the course could perhaps include fewer readings; at the same time, many students noted an appreciation for multi-media material. A primary goal for Professor Olson for Fall Semester 2016 is to do a better job of clarifying and articulating course goals and objectives.

NOTE: OCS 300: The Ethnographic Experience in Hawaii provides an opportunity to provide an experiential, ethnographic component that builds on material learned in ANTH 250. OCS 300 requires a “hands-on” ethnographic experience that includes service learning activities, museum and cultural heritage site visits, and opportunities for immersion in local culture. Final requirements include power point and (for the first time this spring) poster presentations; both of these final requirements seem useful for assessing learning objective 9 for students to develop an appreciation for diverse lifeways.

#### ANTH 230: Culture and Gardens (CML)

This is a course designed specifically by Prof. Olson as a CML course and his plan is to assess the course’s future within the major as the college moves to a different framework for general education requirements. In general, the course would need to become more anthropological in content (with a more global focus on cultural ecology) while retaining some of the “hands-on” assignments for creation of garden plans. Olson will assess more fully as course evaluations become available later this summer.

#### SOC 294 Research Methods for the Social Sciences

Research Methods for the Social Sciences is designed for our sociology/anthropology majors and minors to meet program goal 4 (to develop theoretical and methodological tools). In recent years, students in other programs have enrolled in the course. During the Spring semester, 15 students completed this course. These students include sociology/anthropology (4), criminal justice (3), political science (3), film and media studies (1), business (1), and undeclared (2) majors. To assess students’ understanding of issues related to study design and analysis, students design and conduct a small empirical project. They complete five short assignments throughout the semester (ie, introduction, literature review, IRB application, etc.). Students revise these assignments and incorporate them into the final paper. Students have at least two one-on-one meetings with Professor Renfrow to discuss their specific project. The last two weeks of the course are devoted to peer workshops on writing for the social sciences. Students present their original research to the class during the final meeting. Professor Olson attended the presentations to help assess student work. Our conclusion is that students would benefit from more instruction in presenting material. We will continue to experiment with this and other courses to determine the best site for this instruction.

### ANTH 359: The Pacific and Cultural Survival (LGI)

ANTH 359 builds on such courses as ANTH 250. The course is similarly designed to meet program goals 1 (to develop informed critical scholars who can communicate in the language of sociology and anthropology) and 3 (to open students' eyes to structural injustices and develop an appreciation for diverse lifeways and to allow students the opportunity to think about creating a more just, equitable and sustainable globe). The focus on the many cultures of the Pacific, from pre-Western contact to the present-day is designed to encourage students to consider the complexity of culture contact, assimilation, resistance, loss, and survival. Such a focus facilitates the opportunity to assess students' abilities to consider the complexity of cultures in the vast geographical area of the Pacific and the ever-increasing connections from the local to the global. In addition, the course allows for an assessment of the progress students are making as they move into upper-level sociology and anthropology courses and engage with higher-level material on anthropological method and theory. Student are assessed through two literature review assignments, two response papers, two opportunities to lead class discussion for 10-15 minutes, and a final problem-solution paper. Class participation is strongly encouraged and counts as 10 of the total course grade. An admittedly quick and impressionistic assessment by Professor Olson is that student performance, in terms of both written and verbal work, improved from past ANTH 359 classes. Professor Olson notes that a higher percentage of students, as compared to previous years, years had a rather full experience with a full complement of sociology and anthropology courses and this is likely to have contributed to their success in the course.

A final note would be that this course seems to fit well with the sustainability program and major and the college's wider mission for sustainability education. Professor Olson will assess course evaluations as they become available later this summer regarding students' evaluation of the course's heavy focus on issues of cultural survival and sustainability.

### SOC 363 Sociological Theory

Sociological Theory is designed to provide sociology/anthropology majors and minors with training in theory to meet program goal 4 (to develop theoretical and methodological tools). During the Fall semester, 13 students completed this course. Students' understanding of concepts and the relationships among concepts were assessed through two take-home exams (eg, long essay, short essay, definitions/applications) and a "theorist salon" oral exam. Their ability to apply theory to contemporary issue was assessed through a final essay.

### SOC 401 Senior Research Seminar

Senior Research Seminar is the culminating experience for our majors. During the Fall semester, eight students completed this course. In addition to working on senior theses, students begin to plan for their transition into graduate programs or the labor market. For several years, we have included a presentation by Alicin Welsh. This year Professor Renfrow also invited six recent alumni to speak to students about their firsthand experiences. Course evaluations indicate that

seniors valued these interactions. As one stated, “I thoroughly enjoyed having alums come/skype into class and share their post-Wells experience. It was very informative and opened my eyes to the wide variety of opportunities available after commencement. Also, it helped to alleviate a lot of anxieties I’ve had about thesis and the ‘adulthood’ process.” Similar, another said, “The alumni aspect is really important and should be continued.” Student indicated they would appreciate even more opportunities to prepare for their life after Wells. One student, for example, suggested we incorporate specific assignments on resume and cover letter writing in the future.

### **The Comprehensive Senior Exam**

This spring, we required, similar to the past year, a written Comprehensive Exam that consisted of answering a number of essay questions.

As we assess our seniors’ Wells experience and their preparedness for the world beyond Wells College, we have noted some key statements made by individual students in their own assessment of their experience. The following are a number of statements pulled from the comprehensive exam essays:

1. The Off Campus Study experience in relation to the SOCA:

“The OCS experience helped to develop [me] as a socially conscious global citizen”

2. The Sociology/Anthropology Experience:

“The major shaped me to become a more aware and socially responsible human. I am able to critique myself, and evaluate my interactions with the outside world, understanding how my actions and words affect others, and how continuing with hegemonic or otherwise socially constructed norms, I can perpetuate things by accident.”

“I have learned about how inequality is both something experienced through day-to-day experiences with other people, but also institutionally. Some of the tools that I have gained throughout my four years at Wells include learning to be critical of many of my assumptions, to recognize that there are many ways of knowing or understanding things, that change is possible in the world, and to recognize systems of oppression.”

SOCA faculty have been engaged in a continuing debate about the effective worth of the written essay comprehensive exam but we acknowledge its potential usefulness in assessing the success of students’ attainment of program goals and of post-Wells preparation of our graduates.

We plan for a more thorough job of staying in touch with recent graduates as they progress through the next five years or so of their post-Wells experience. This will facilitate a better understanding of “fit” of the major for career preparation.

**Final “Focus Group” Assessment Discussion (see two attached photos of meeting notes from classroom board):**

In addition to the comprehensive exam, for the first time, we required a final group assessment of the Wells Sociology/Anthropology experience. This session was attended by Professors Renfrow and Olson and 8 of our senior students.

**The two questions we asked the senior focus group:**

**1. Which aspects of the major contributed most to your learning?**

“small close-knit department with open door policy”

“local global connections” “looking outside of self”

“interdisciplinary readings/topics”

“appreciation/empathy for others”

“good balance of general and specific topics”

“combination of faculty with different interests and topics taught”

“OCS options good”

“classes in program connect to others in program” “connects with minors”

“connects to other disciplines on campus”

“connecting theory/concepts to concrete examples”

“connecting self to topics”

“classes not ordinary/different in good ways from other schools”

“career guidance/internships are valuable = continue!”

**2. Which aspects of the major, if any, distracted from your learning?**

“senior thesis in fall is not great = how about a 1 year thesis (optional?)”

SOCA faculty, including Laura McClusky, have had an initial email discussion of the data from this focus group and this will continue this summer into the Fall Semester.

**ACTION PLAN FOR 2016-17:**

Clearly, this information gives the faculty much to contemplate as we plan for the upcoming year; our plan is circulate syllabi among SOCA faculty prior to the beginning of the Fall Semester to allow for some evaluation, critique, and revision before the semester begins. We will then meet during the first week of classes this Fall Semester to further clarify the what, when, and who of our action plan

Respectfully submitted,

Ernie Olson

Chair, SOCA