

## **I. AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY STATEMENT**

### **The Sociology/Anthropology Major's General Response:**

In the last few years, the major, in response to recommendations from the assessment committee, has implemented a more incremental structure for the major, particularly in regard to the teaching of theory and method. This structure starts with both of the major's introductory courses, and then continues incrementally with methods courses, theory courses, internships, OCS courses, and a range of area courses. We continue to actively evaluate and revise course syllabi to provide faculty and students a guide to this incremental structure framework for learning and its assessment. Our goal is to ensure that all syllabi clearly articulate goals, objectives, and means of assessment. This has meant updating and revising syllabi for current courses and creating assessment-oriented syllabi for new courses.

In addition, Sociology/Anthropology faculty, active in the creation of new majors and minors, continue to consider the best strategies for assessing the ways in which complementary majors and minors in the areas of criminology, sustainability, indigenous studies, and museum studies, to name a few, affect and enhance the student learning outcomes of our Sociology/Anthropology majors and minors. We continue to actively consider how to best assess the educational value of these connections in regard to our students' acquisition of particular knowledge and skills.

In response to recommendations from the assessment committee, the major continues to focus on improving the senior thesis experience and providing a better instrument for assessment of the student's academic progress from the first day of arrival to graduation. Our senior capstone experience--consisting of senior seminar, senior thesis research and written material, oral presentation of the thesis, poster creation and poster presentation of the thesis, and comprehensive exams—have been our means for a full assessment of the student's history of academic progress while at Wells. However, the academic year of 2014-2015 was our final year to include a senior comprehensive exam as a key part of our senior assessment plan. However, it must be said that our rubric for assessment of the senior experience has been more qualitative than quantitative in nature, and our plan for 2015-16 is to consider ways in which we might better assess this approach.

For the past few years, as noted in previous assessment reports, we have begun to implement an increasing emphasis on the individual portfolio (via Portfolio software) as a primary means of general assessment—from introductory courses through the senior thesis seminar. The focus on the portfolio makes sense because it takes advantage of our focus, particularly in anthropology, on qualitative research and assessment methods; it highlights the significance and importance of each student and their individual career pathway; it allows for an individual assessment of incremental progress from day one to graduation, and it allows for specific consideration of a student's incorporation of specific minors and areas of interest. 2015-16 will be our first year to put the portfolio requirement at the center of your final assessment of your senior majors and minors; the portfolio, as mentioned previously, will serve as a replacement for the senior comprehensive exam.

As the major looks to the future, our plan includes expansion in the areas of public sociology, applied anthropology, and sustainability to support new initiatives and programs at Wells; specifically, we look to supporting the areas of criminology, sustainability, social and economic justice, and material/museum studies. The primary assessment goal continues to be to better evaluate the degree of student success for reaching a high level of proficiency in written work, quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, communication skills, and critical thinking.

### **The Major's Specific Response:**

#### **II. Measurable Learning Outcomes, IV. Planning for the Future and V. Using Feedback):**

The major, in implementing feedback from the assessment committee, continues to give particular focus to a more incremental assessment of student performance. The senior year continues to be most important for assessment of student achievement; the senior thesis project, thesis poster presentation, and the senior portfolio evaluation are key assessment components. At the same time, our goal is to better assess the progress of students from their first year at Wells on through the senior experience.

### **II. MEETING**

As already mentioned, the major has implemented some significant restructuring of the major and this restructuring is increasingly significant for our Means of Assessment of Outcomes. The major devoted a portion of Sociology/Anthropology meeting time during the past academic year for discussion of our strategies for assessment; however, our goal is to do a better job of giving a primary focus to assessment for the 2015-16 academic year.

Assessment of Library Research Skills: For the **100 level**, we continue to assess writing skills, library research skills, problem-solving skills, and comprehension of foundational concepts. Anthropology 161: An Introduction to Anthropology and Sociology 151: Principles of Sociology continue to include a library workshop component that is directly tied to library research writing projects. This inclusion allows faculty members to more easily assess library, research, and writing skills while also assessing grasp of foundational concepts.

Assessment of Writing and Critical Reasoning Skills: We continue to require a **portfolio**, starting with Anthropology 161 and Sociology 151, as part of the major's requirements. The portfolio ideally contains the full range of materials (research papers, quizzes, exams, field notes, and so forth) beginning with introductory courses and then all other relevant courses to the major up through the senior thesis project. From our perspective, the portfolio emphasizes the importance of writing within the major AND allows for easier assessment of the faculty member.

Assessment of Applied Skills and Experiential Learning: We are strongly encouraging first and second year students to complete 190 internships that complement the goals of the major. Once the 190 internship is completed, we encourage students to enrich their experiential and service learning education by taking additional internships during the summer and during the January Intersession. The materials from these experiences are also part of the portfolio for final assessment in the senior year. In addition, majors are strongly encouraged to participate in off campus study, both abroad and within the United States, and to incorporate those experiences into writing projects and research assignments, and thereby allow faculty to engage in some assessment of such OCS experiences.

Assessment of Research Skills: As reflected in our course syllabi, we are in the process of creating better assessment strategies for our **200 level courses**. This is particularly true for the two 200 level methods courses: Anthropology 260: Ethnographic Methods and Sociology 294 Research Methods for the Social Sciences. In these two courses, a strong focus on research projects allows faculty to fully assess students' success in gaining research abilities and knowledge via the respective methods taught in each course. Of course, these research projects ideally become a rich addition to the individual student's portfolio and a key means of assessing student progress in the middle portion of their career at Wells. A student's grade in the required statistics course is also a component in our assessment of research and quantitative reasoning skills.

Assessment of Foundational and Subfield Knowledge within the Major. In addition to the research methods courses, our goal is to offer a reasonable exposure to the major subfields within sociology and anthropology while stressing the fundamentals of the disciplines. The limitations of our ability to offer a full range of courses has caused us to stress the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach that strategically incorporates complementary courses from across the Wells curriculum, from internship experiences (with their service learning and experiential learning components), and from off campus study opportunities. Such a strategy creates challenges for uniform, first hand assessment but we feel that the individual portfolio best captures the depth and range of student success and gives us a reasonably accurate "window" of their progress.

As already stated, we are working to ensure that students are thoroughly exposed to method and theory in all of our courses. We argue that this will allow us adhere to the mission statement of the college AND prepare students for career pathways within the disciplines of anthropology and sociology and beyond. We are actively and strongly encouraging our majors to take the research courses BEFORE the student enrolls in most 300 level courses for the major. This ensures a superior, incremental learning experience for the student AND a better means of assessment of the student's real progress. This is a strategy to build on knowledge and skills already learned in 100 level courses and also prepare our students for the more rigorous demands of our 300 level seminars. We also feel that this will be a better means of providing students with the ability to assess THEMSELVES in terms of interest and aptitude for the disciplines of sociology or anthropology. Again, we believe that the portfolio, fully implemented, is our primary vehicle for such self-assessment.

Assessment of the Critical Use of Theory: We are currently working to provide better assessment of outcomes at the 300 level, particularly in regard to high level engagement with theory and method. The plan is two-fold: allow faculty to teach their particular areas of interest (particularly of research interest) and encourage faculty to make connections to the primary goals and mission of the major. The major has two 300 level theory courses, one in sociology and one in anthropology, for the purpose of fostering engagement for all students in a relatively full range of social science theory. That is to say, all 300 level courses in the major should allow for a rich assessment of a student's ability to critically comprehend and evaluate scholarship in the form of books, peer-reviewed journal articles, films, and public presentations.

Assessment of the Senior Experience: A significant but exciting challenge for the senior thesis seminar is the increasing diversity of senior thesis projects; for example, every year we can anticipate topics in social media, social psychology, archaeology, psychological anthropology, criminology, sociology of education, ritual studies, and so forth.

An additional challenge is to ensure that students are fully prepared for the senior thesis project; this year's assessment of student performance on the senior thesis project gives evidence that the requirement of at least one methods course and at least one theory course taken BEFORE the senior thesis seminar has fostered better preparation for the senior seminar. In addition, going forward, our plan is to create stricter requirements for more significant inclusion of methodology and theory in all 300 level courses and the senior thesis project (including at least some theory and methodology learned within Wells Sociology/Anthropology courses); this, in turn, will allow for a more straightforward and accurate assessment of student knowledge and research. At the same time, going forward, faculty will be insistent that the senior research project MUST be new research that significantly expands upon any prior work.

The Sociology/Anthropology faculty continues to endorse the requirement for all seniors to create a computer-generated poster of their thesis project and participate in a public poster session that requires the student to publicly articulate the relationship between the contents of the poster and the fuller senior thesis project. This requirement has proven to be a very useful means of faculty assessment of each student. In addition, it seems that the poster session allows for a rich opportunity for students to self-assess themselves based on their sense of success in conveying the content of their poster and thesis project.

### **III. THE SOCIOLOGY/ANTHROPOLOGY FACULTY'S PLAN FOR WHAT IT WILL FOCUS ON IN THE UPCOMING ACADEMIC YEAR**

The major will continue its efforts to update all course syllabi, course requirements, and means of course assessment. The senior thesis seminar will fully implement the portfolio as a key means of assessment for the senior level. The upcoming Fall Semester will require further discussion of the best means of assessment of the portfolio, the curricular goals of the major, and the place of the major within the framework of the mission of the college. Our consideration of the feasibility for a pair of 1-2 credit, 7 week courses to complement the beginning of the Fall Semester senior thesis project AND the beginning of the final Spring Semester with its poster session and portfolio defense/comprehensive exam has been put on hold in response to the college's implementation of college-wide courses with a focus on general academic skills and preparation for post-Wells success.

### **IV. AN UPDATED ASSESSMENT PLAN**

The major will continue its development of a portfolio based assessment model, a model that best highlights and utilized the personal, individualized approach of Wells as a small liberal arts college expanding in new directions.

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Professor Ernie Olson  
Chair of Sociology and Anthropology