

## **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, then both methods courses, both theory courses, internships, OCS courses, and area-specialty courses. We have been actively evaluating and revising course syllabi to reflect this incremental structure and to provide a better, more visible framework for assessment. Our goal is to ensure that all syllabi clearly reflect 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, the major's faculty have been active in the creation of new majors and minors, while, at the same time, making strong connections with old and new minors such as Social and Economic Justice, Criminal Justice, Environmental Studies, First Nations and Indigenous Studies, and Museum Studies. We are actively thinking of how to best assess the educational value of these connections in regard to our students' acquisition of particular knowledge and skills through these connections.

In response to recommendations from the assessment committee, the major has focused on both improving the senior thesis experience and providing a better instrument for assessment of the student's academic progress from day of arrival to graduation. Our senior capstone experience--consisting of senior seminar, senior thesis research and written material, oral presentation, poster and poster presentation, and comprehensive exams—are our means for a full assessment of the student's history of academic progress while at Wells.

We have begun to implement an increasing emphasis on the individual portfolio (via Portfolio software) as our primary means of general assessment from intro courses through to the senior thesis. 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.

As the major looks to the future, our five year plan includes expansion in the areas of public sociology and applied anthropology to support new initiatives and programs at Wells; specifically, we look to supporting the areas of criminal justice, sustainability, social and economic justice, and museum studies. The primary assessment goal is 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 comprehensive exam all remain key assessment components. However, 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**

In the past few years, the major has implemented some significant restructuring of the major and this restructuring is increasingly significant for our Means of Assessment of Outcomes. An increase in an incremental structuring of the major from 100 level courses to the 400 level senior thesis means that assessment begins at the introductory level. The major devoted a significant portion of meeting time during the academic year for discussion of our strategies for assessment.

Assessment of Library Research Skills: For the **100 level**, we are assessing 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 have both added a library workshop component that is directly tied to library research writing projects. This addition 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 are requiring 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 should also become part of the portfolio for final assessment in the senior year. In addition, majors are currently 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 a better assessment strategy 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 be able 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 are hopeful that the portfolio, as it becomes fully implemented, will be the 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 recently approved two 300 level theory courses, one in sociology and one in anthropology, with the goal of engaging 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; for the future, we hope that the requirement of at least one methods course and at least one theory course taken BEFORE the senior thesis seminar will foster better preparation for the senior seminar. In addition, going forward, our plan is to create stricter requirements for more significant inclusion within the thesis of methodology and theory (including at least some theory and methodology learned within Wells Sociology/Antropology 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.

Partly in response to some previous suggestions by the assessment committee, we have created a new requirement for the seniors: all seniors must now 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

new 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 GROUP'S PLAN FOR WHAT IT WILL FOCUS ON IN THE UPCOMING YEAR = WORK FOR NEXT SEMESTER**

The major will continue its efforts to revise the comprehensive exam so that it is a better, more accurate measure of student success in meeting the goals of the major and the college. At the same time, we are currently discussing the possibility of making the portfolio the primary means of final assessment of the graduating senior and doing away with the current comprehensive exam.

It should be noted that less than satisfactory results from the comprehensive exam, is pushing us to a new model of final assessment of student progress at Wells. In fact, we are in the VERY PRELIMINARY discussion stage of considering the feasibility of 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. The first 7 week course would possibly include workshops on research skills, theoretical frameworks, writing strategies, and the like; the second 7 week course would possibly include poster making workshops, resume writing, oral presentations of the thesis, and so forth. Needless to say, all of this is very preliminary.

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

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

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