

Anthropology Program Assessment Report

AY 2013-14

UHWOs small Anthropology program is currently in a state of flux. There is only one tenured faculty position (Falgout); a second non-tenure track position (Turner) is being converted to tenure track, with a national search in progress. Anthropology will add a third position, one in physical anthropology, in fall; however, it is unclear whether this will be non-tenure track or tenure-track. New hires in Anthropology will likely result in changes to the curriculum. Meanwhile, all of our current lower-division courses as well as many of our upper-division courses in physical anthropology are taught by a somewhat changing cast of part-time lecturers. Under these circumstances, Anthropology developed very modest plans for assessments for AY 2013-14.

The Anthropology Assessment Plan scheduled the written communication (CLO1) and oral communication (CLO2) concentration outcomes for review in AY 2013-14. This assessment focused on Anthropology's culminating courses, SSCI 490A and 490F Senior Practicum. The SSCI 490A course is the one required for students who are pursuing the concentration; it is a writing-intensive course. The SSCI 490F course is the one required for students who are only pursuing the Certificate in Applied Forensic Anthropology; it is not writing intensive. (SSCI 486 Senior Project was also scheduled for assessment; however, the one student who enrolled withdrew from the course before the end of the semester.) We used the VALUE rubrics developed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities for written and oral communication to evaluate student works in conducting the assessments described here.

Table 1 presents a summary of the Anthropology program's assessment efforts during the Fall of 2013. The current 2 full-time Anthropology faculty (Falgout and Turner) provided assessment reports as directed by the Assessment Committee. Both courses were delivered in-person.

Table 1. Summary of Anthropology program's assessment efforts during AY 2013-14.

Assessing Faculty	Faculty Rank	Course Alpha	Sections Assessed	Course Level	Course Modality
Dr. Turner	Associate Professor	SSCI 490A	1	Upper	In-person
Dr. Turner	Associate Professor	SSCI 490F	1	Upper	In-person

Procedures

All students enrolled in these small course sections were assessed—five students in SSCI 490A and two students in SSCI 490F. Both of the current full-time faculty members applied the written communication VALUE rubric to a weekly journal (490F) or to a final draft of a small research paper related to their practicum site (SSCI 490A). Both applied the oral communication VALUE rubric to the final oral presentations in each of these courses. A few minor differences in scoring were settled during a brief discussion. Then, after completing the assessments of written communication and oral

communication on these courses, the participating Anthropology faculty convened during the Spring 2014 Professional Development Day to discuss their course-level findings. These discussions led to the identification of the Anthropology program's strengths and recommendations for program changes to address any shortcomings in student learning.

Findings

Written Communication. The written communication VALUE rubric evaluates student writing on five dimensions that include: 1) clarity 2) content development, 3) writing mechanics 4) anthropology style, and 5) documentation. The VALUE rubric to scores these dimensions on a 4-point scale (1) inadequate, (2) adequate (3) competent (4) advanced.

Table 2 shows that across both courses evaluated the mean scores for each written communication rubric dimension range from 3 (competent) to 4 (advanced).

Table 2. Mean scores for each written communication VALUE rubric dimension for SSCI 490A and 490F.

Course	Clarity	Content	Mechanics	Style	Documentation
SSCI 490A	4	3	3	3.6	3.6
SSCI 490F	4	N/A	4	N/A	N/A

The highest possible overall mean score for written communication is 20. The overall mean score of students in SSCI 490A was high, with a mean score of 17.2 (exceeds standard). However, even that high mean score does not sufficiently reflect the high quality of their work.

Overall, students in SSCI 490A did an excellent job on their final small research papers. The lower scores for SSCI 490A were for content development (3) and mechanics (3). Actually, a real strength of all final drafts was in all students' very competent review of source data, often on very interesting but somewhat arcane topics and with materials that can be difficult to locate. However, for a short practicum paper, students were not expected to and did not produce original ideas (the criteria for 4). The lower score for mechanics was accurate, due to the fact that some of the final drafts still needed a bit of final polish in this area.

Likewise, students in SSCI 490F did excellent work in writing their weekly journals in terms of clarity of writing (4) and writing mechanics (4). (The two students enrolled in this section had already earned Bachelor's degrees at another institution before entering this program.) Weekly journal writing consists of students' descriptions, analyses, and reflections on their practicum experiences. They are not expected to contain outside sources of information or the development of original ideas. As such, we considered the criteria of content development, anthropology style, and documentation to be *not applicable* to an evaluation of journal writing.

Oral Communication. The oral communication VALUE rubric evaluates student oral communication on five dimensions that include: 1) clarity, 2) effectiveness, 3) delivery, 4) content, and 5) style.

Table 2 shows that across both courses evaluated the mean scores for each oral communication rubric range from 2 (adequate) to 3 (advanced).

Table 3. Mean scores for each oral communication VALUE rubric dimension for SSCI 490A and 490F.

Course	Clarity	Effectiveness	Delivery	Content	Style
SSCI 490A	3	3	3	3	2.6
SSCI 490F	2.5	2.5	3	2.5	2

The highest possible overall mean score for oral communication is a 15. The overall mean score for SSCI 490A was very high, at 14.6. The overall score for SSCI 490F was slightly lower, at 12.5.

The lower scores for both SSCI 490A and 490F were on the criteria of style (2.6 and 2, respectively). These lower scores were the result of a few students who were obviously very nervous and therefore rushed in their presentations, as well as from a few who neglected to cite their academic sources at the end of their presentations.

We believe several factors lower overall mean scores on oral communication for SSCI 490F. First, the SSCI 490A writing intensive section is required to meet with the class for several additional sessions during the semester. In addition, they are required to work with other students in that section to conduct peer-reviews of others' papers. As a result, those students formed close bonds with one another and progressively helped one another to develop and polish their skills. As such, there was some motivation at the end of the semester to perform well in front of their peers. The SSCI 490F students missed those additional opportunities to bond with others and to further develop this skill. Neither of the students in that section took the final step to convert their final presentation into PowerPoint format. In addition, one student in the SSCI 490F section became disgruntled with their on-site practicum experience; we believe this affected the student's overall attitude in the course and thus the level of polish given to the oral presentation.

Conclusions

Written Communication. The Anthropology curriculum requires written assignments in virtually all of its courses. These range from essay tests, reports, reaction/reflection papers, and analytical papers, to formal research papers. We invite staff from the UHWO Library and No'eau Learning Center to give presentations on information literacy and writing. And, we often require papers to be written over several drafts that are commented upon by faculty and/or peers. This is also the case for our culminating courses, such as SSCI 490A and 490F that are reviewed here.

The written communication assessment has confirmed our belief that course assignments throughout the Anthropology curriculum result in our students becoming very good writers in their culminating courses. We note that these students were a particularly tight-knit and motivated cohort this year, and we acknowledge the important role that also played in the high scores this group attained. A minor weakness was found in students' control over the mechanics of writing.

Oral Communication. The Anthropology curriculum now requires oral presentations in a number of our courses. Especially at upper-division level, there is an emphasis on professional PowerPoint presentations that summarize findings, provide critical reflection, and referencing of sources.

Results from the oral communication assessment in SSCI 490A and 490F reveal that our Anthropology students are performing at a very high level in their culminating courses. They also show that some of our postgraduate students from other institutions students lacked an understanding and motivation for professionalism by giving formal PowerPoint presentations, with acknowledgement of academic references.

Recommendations

After discussing these findings, the Anthropology faculty have made the following recommendations to address the shortcomings found in our students' learning:

1. Provide Anthropology students with more focused instruction and feedback on the mechanics of writing when assigning and grading their written works.
2. Provide those students who are only pursuing the Certificate in Forensic Anthropology program and who are therefore enrolled in SSCI 490F (non-writing intensive) with more opportunities to participate with the entire class of students. Also, explicitly instruct those students on the need for more professional presentation of findings, such as in PowerPoint format.