January 27, 2019

To: Anthropology Students, Faculty, and Community

From: Dr. Andrew Newman, Associate Professor, Director Undergraduate Studies, Department of Anthropology, Wayne State University

Re: Anthropology Major Program Assessment Update for Academic Year 2017-2018

I am pleased to provide you with a yearly update on our efforts to continually assess and improve the quality of education received by our majors. Last year, the Wayne State Department of Anthropology embarked on an action plan to raise the profile of undergraduate research in the department. At the same time, we also tracked and analyzed data on three program outcomes, Engagement and Practice, Team Building and Global/Local Engagement. Not surprisingly, we see a direct relationship between these outcomes and our goal of raising the profile of undergraduate research. In this report, I’ll describe the actions taken in pursuit of these goals, details how we assessed our efforts, and provide an overview of logical next steps.

In order to make research more central to the identity of the undergraduate program, we made changes to raise the profile of research across the board.

1. **We undertook a survey of faculty on course assignments** that developed skills in proposal writing as well global/local engagement. See next section for more information.

2. **We began a proposal writing workshop for undergraduates** to apply for funding from CLAS. As a result of the participation in this workshop, we had 3 UROP applications instead of only 1 for last year. All 3 were accepted. It should be mentioned that last year’s sole UROP participant was awarded the prize for best poster presentation. This goes with our general observation that though our students do extremely well in these programs, we underutilize them at a broader level.

3. **Every graduating senior now conducts a public research presentation off campus as part of our annual capstone class’s Anthropology Undergraduate Research Showcase.** We began a measure of all undergraduate conference papers (5 conference papers, + 31 capstone research presentation). The capstone event was attended approximately 80 people including multiple alumni (one of which is a donor).

4. **At our annual recognition potluck, we read out the names of our UROP Awardees as well as publically acknowledge the winner and runner-up of our newly created Arnold Pilling Anthropology Research Paper prize for undergraduates.**

5. **An undergraduate student now sits on the Undergraduate Committee to involve students in assessment.**
Assessing Our Efforts

During Winter 2018, we implemented a survey of full time faculty on several themes. First, in order to better understand how we are supporting undergraduate research across the board, we asked about types of research assignments students are required to do, *beyond the classic research paper*. Second, we asked about the degree to which different courses engaged two outcomes we measured this year, team-building and global-local engagement. Based on what we heard from the 11 faculty who taught undergraduates this semester:

- 4 of 11 faculty members teaching undergraduates in these sections (Introduction to Archeology) reported that they required undergraduates to write research proposals.

- 7 of 11 faculty reported that they required students to do team-based assignments. There were 13 sections covering a wide variety of classes that contained these assignments. There was also a diverse array of team-based work employed. For examples, some classes such as ANT 3100 (Cultures of the World) required weekly team-based activities on reading, but still had students submit individual research papers of their own design in each.

- 9 of 11 faculty reported that they engaged with global issues in their classes. Students do this in an incredible variety of ways. For example, in ANT 3200 (Lost Cities and Ancient Civilizations) students develop a briefing document for visiting United Nations World Heritage status delegation on why some local Detroit-area archeological sites have global significance. In ANT 3410 students choose one of three real world scenarios: 1. palliative care in Botswana, 2. the ongoing measles outbreak in Europe, or 3. tuberculosis in South African gold mines in order to read an in-depth research report.

- 9 of 11 faculty reported that they directly engaged topics related to Detroit, or local institutions in Detroit and the surrounding area on their assignments. Again, depending on the subfield of anthropology, students do this in a variety of ways. In ANT 2100 (Introduction to Anthropology) students wrote a site analysis of the DIA that included a close study of a specific artifact as well as an ethnographic study on how visitors use the museum and interact with the artifacts. In ANT 5996 (Capstone) students authored policy papers for Mayor Duggan and publicly presented the work to a representative from the Detroit Department of Urban Planning.

Discussion

**Issue: Undergraduate Research.** We are pleased that the number of students who applied for UROP funding grew from 1 to 3, and that students have distinguished themselves within UROP for their success. We hope for more growth in this area, nonetheless. The courses which feature proposal writing, Introduction to Archeology (ANT 3020) and ANT 5700 (Applied
Anthropology) happen to be well placed to offer students exposure to this skill at different stages in their undergraduate careers.

- **Action Item:** Design a research proposal assignment for a mid-level required courses that is required of all majors. ANT 3100 meets this criteria. After this assignment has been established, we will re-assess proposal writing to see if this intervention resulted in more undergraduate research involvement across the major.

**Issue: Team-Building Assignments.** We are satisfied with the amount and variety of experience students receive in team-building assignments. However, we would like to see this practice maintained, will take steps expand it further.

- **Action Item:** The Undergraduate Director will collect examples of a variety of team-building assignments from existing course syllabi and share them at faculty meetings, to increase awareness of this type of assignment and promote the practice. We will continue to collect data this on outcome during the regular assessment cycle.

**Issue: Global/Local Engagement Assignments.** While we are satisfied with the amount of global/local engagement assignments (this should be taken for granted in an anthropology department) we are particularly pleased on the variety and ingenuity of assignments. In order to maintain this work, and promote continued professional development we will take the following steps:

- **Action Item:** The Undergraduate Director will collect examples of a variety of global and local engagement assignments from existing course syllabi and the faculty survey and share them at faculty meetings, to increase awareness of this type of assignment and promote the practice. We will continue to collect data on this outcome during the regular assessment cycle.

**Conclusion**

AY 2017-2018 saw positive changes in the public profile of undergraduate research in the Anthropology Department. Simple interventions, such as reading out the names of awardees and creating a paper prize have dramatically increased the visibility of undergraduate research. In developing an Undergraduate Research Showcase in ANT 5996 (Capstone) and inviting the public to the event we have created a tradition that now draws friends, family, and alumni. In short, we have created a community around undergraduate research.

In the current year, we are turning our attention to the most basic courses in the major and will assess fundamental components of anthropological knowledge.