

**Academic Program Review for the
Department of Anthropology, University of New Mexico**
1/19/09

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The Academic Program Review Committee studied the organization, operations, and facilities of the Department of Anthropology, University of New Mexico. Over November 3, 4, and 5, the committee met with numerous groups and individuals from the Department and University administration. We studied various documents including the Departmental Self-study, a Departmental Vision Statement, and a study of Departmental PhDs and their employment history. We feel that we have a reasonable view of the Department's successes and challenges, and we are pleased to provide the following summary of our review and its recommendations.

Executive Summary.

The Department of Anthropology is recognized as a premier program within the University of New Mexico, and it stands central to the University's mission to be a major research university and to serve the State's diverse population. The Department's success depends on both University and private support, but it has managed with a comparatively limited budget to obtain regional, national, and international recognition. We point to three major areas of concern: the Department's vision and future direction with new hires, the enlarged graduate program, and the specific problems with facilities. Our five recommendations for action are placed at the end of this report.

Strengths of the Department

We believe that the Department of Anthropology can legitimately claim to be among the top twenty or so North American programs in Anthropology and to be recognized internationally for its stellar faculty, journals, and edited journals. It is among the highest rated departments at UNM, and the reputation of the University is enhanced substantially by the Department's continued national and international prominence. The success of the program is well summarized in the reports made available to the Review Committee and to the University, and we simply highlight the most salient points involving its history, active adjustments to achieve excellence, and success in graduate and undergraduate education.

The Department has a history of strength in its three subfields of anthropology (ethnology, archaeology, and evolutionary anthropology) in addition to its strong focus on the American Southwest. From the beginnings in the 1920s, the charismatic archaeologist Edgar Lee Hewett crafted the identity of the Department, and by extension the University. He did this by emphasizing the importance of Southwestern cultures and cultural histories that have created the exceptional diversity that is New Mexico. Both the ethnology and archaeology subfields focus heavily on the public place and public service

of Anthropology within the State. The archaeology subfield has a long-tradition of excellence in Southwestern archaeology within both a strongly comparative framework and an applied public archaeology program. The ethnology program, and the Ortiz Center in particular, has developed a vibrant regional focus along with its broader intellectual approaches. In the past 15 years, the remarkably successful and internationally recognized program in Evolutionary Anthropology has emerged as a cutting-edge leader in evolutionary approaches. Through its history, the Department has been home to some extraordinary scholars, including major names in the discipline such as Keith Basso, Lewis Binford, Jane Buikstra, Alfonso Ortiz, and Erik Trinkaus. Among its present members are highly respected individuals such as Patty Crown, Hillard Kaplan, Louise Lamphere (former president of the American Anthropological Association), Jane Lancaster, and Sylvia Rodríguez.

In response to major opportunities and challenges, the Department has shown a strong ability to readjust and reformulate itself. To solve a gap in departmental leadership, the faculty successfully recruited an outside chair (Michael Graves). He has been responsible for directing needed change to date. The new program in evolutionary anthropology was fashioned by a structural change, combining and successfully integrating biological and evolutionary behavioral approaches to create a new and more manageable three-subfield structure. In response to the Review Committee's request, the subfields of the Department drafted a good mission and vision statement identifying their major strengths and potential bridging themes to other subfields.

The graduate and undergraduate programs are highly successful. The graduate program is large and dynamic. We were impressed by its students' energy, enthusiasm, and ingenuity. The numbers of PhDs produced has increased over the years, and many have found good jobs in their respective fields. The record of successful employment reflects well the Department's good standing and the effectiveness of its graduate program. The students' unusually good record of receiving highly competitive National Science Foundation dissertation improvement grants is particularly impressive as a measure of faculty mentoring and student drive. The undergraduate program is also doing well with steady growth over the past 10 years, showing a rise of 22% from 2003 to 2007. The Department's field schools appear to be strong and well recognized, and deserve continued support.

Overall, most of the Department's facilities (in particular, the Hibben Center, Maxwell Museum, Anthropology Building and its offices) are excellent, as good as or better than most comparable Departments across the country. The Southwestern style of architecture is both pleasing and appropriate for the regional focus of the Department. We note specifically the Department's partnerships with the Maxwell Museum, the Ortiz Center, the Parks Service with its Chaco Canyon project, and the Cultural Resource Management unit. These create a substantial public face for the Department that has great potential as an integrative theme across the Department.

Finally, we draw special attention to the two major journals that have been developed and run within the Department. *The Journal of Anthropological Research*, edited by Lawrence Straus, is a long-standing, four-field journal of anthropology, which we consider to be one of the best and most independent in our field. *Human Nature*, edited by Jane Lancaster, has been instrumental in developing evolutionary anthropology and

has obtained one of the highest impact ratings for any anthropology journal. These journals have enhanced the reputation of the Department, and they deserve special University support.

Challenges

We identify a number of significant challenges for the Department, some requiring effective Departmental action and others requiring substantial University support. We believe that, under its new organization and leadership, the Department can make the innovative changes that will help to broaden and heighten its effectiveness. Most of our recommendations will, however, require funding and support from the University. In our experience, it is usually not a good idea for a review committee to stress such needs for major funding. Universities always face extra-ordinary and diverse claims on their resources, and an external review committee does not have the perspective to balance these competing demands. Nevertheless, we feel strongly that, as a central jewel in the crown of the University, the Anthropology Department deserves robust financial support not only to maintain the quality of the Department as it transitions to a new generation of faculty, but also thereby to maintain the reputation and effectiveness of the University. We believe that our recommendations offer an excellent opportunity to invest in the Department and in so doing, the University's future.

The most important challenge for the Department is to develop a vision for its development over the next ten years. The subfields and their individual members have been allowed to develop largely independently and the result is that the Department is uneven in its strengths and not well integrated towards its goals. In the admirable report *Twenty-First Century Visions for Anthropology at the University of New Mexico*, prepared in response to our visit, each subfield tries to define central foci and integrating themes. We view this document as a draft, an important first step towards creating a 10-year plan with a more sharply focused vision statement and a clear direction to guide future hiring.

The Department has recently lost several important faculty members and others are close to retirement. We strongly recommend that the Department not try to replace those faculty one-for-one based on those who have gone; such a strategy is what we call 'pothole filling,' and it is rarely effective as a means to achieve distinction. A systematic hiring plan should be developed based on the intent to rebuild the program using a clear sense of departmental and subfield objectives within reinforcing webs of interaction. In order to draft such a plan, each subfield needs to have an agreed focus, and its members must craft a clear identity, working together initially as a core group without faculty from the affiliated programs. Additionally, the Department, as a whole, must establish together certain bridging themes by which each subfield can build on and contribute to the strengths of the others. In simple terms, each subfield needs to be strengthened and integrated, and effective bridges must be built between these subfields, whether theoretical (evolutionary theory, ecology) or topical (people to place, identity, and issues of the Southwest). Finally, the hiring plan must consider the strengths of the Department with respect to other units of the University. The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology is a

major resource. So too is the Ortiz Center, which should be cherished as the centerpiece for the public face of anthropology and which should also offer the vital opportunities for subfields to interact together to promote public communication. We strongly support hiring a permanent director for the Center. Additionally, the Center for Human Evolutionary Studies is a University center with high potential for participation by the Evolutionary Anthropology subfield to develop a broader University strength. Other interdisciplinary possibilities include forging stronger ties between the ethnology faculty and faculty working on the Southwest in Departments of Linguistics and Spanish. These current and potential institutional linkages will provide productive ways for the Anthropology Department to increase its effectiveness and to help build the overall reputation of the University. Such collaborations will be facilitated particularly once the Department has established its long-term vision.

The focus for the 10-year plan must be on faculty hires. Although the Department anticipates a number of retirements that will challenge the current standing of its program, we see no effective transition plan in place, and we hear about fears within the Department that the University will not support replacements. This has caused a loss of direction and poor morale within the Department that must be reversed. Evolutionary Anthropology is in particularly good shape; it has a clear focus and a dynamic young faculty. Ethnology and Archaeology have lost scholars of high distinction, and future retirements are planned. These two subfields need to be strategic in their future hires to rebuild their programs with distinction and with an eye toward integrating with the broader strengths of the Department and University. Their first principle should be to build towards strength. We emphasize that, once a strong plan is in place, the University must aggressively support Departmental hiring, because Anthropology is among the University's top academic programs and it fits so well with the University's mission and the interests of the State. Despite dire economic conditions, to delay hiring now would be a false economy, causing the rapid weakening of the Department's reputation. Delaying hiring would, in the long run, cost the University dearly with efforts needed to restore the program with costly and risky senior faculty hires. New hires should be requested in Spring 2009 to realize the first step in the anticipated hiring plan. We believe that the first hire in Ethnology should be at open rank to allow for the maximum applicant pool and highest likelihood to recruit the best candidate to build the program along the lines laid out in the hiring plan. This hire should link in area or theoretical interests to another subfield's interest or to another program in the University, such as Linguistics.

A second challenge for the Department is to reorganize the Graduate Program, which as constituted has a number of weaknesses that makes it less effective than desired. First, it is too large and poorly funded. It should, we feel, be downsized by admitting fewer students, with a goal of 10-12 (4 per subfield) new students per year. A good sign is that the number of new students admitted has already been reduced from 57 to 36 from 2003 to 2007. A decrease in size would allow admitting students who have the most potential to strengthen each subfield. We heard two reasons why the current policy of having a large student body was necessary: 1) top students are difficult to recruit, requiring a virtually open admission policy, in which most applicants are admitted and then allowed to prove themselves or fail; and 2) the University imposes requirements as to the

minimum numbers of student needed for any graduate course in order for a faculty member to get teaching credit for it, which means that large numbers of students are required to permit the courses in the graduate curriculum to be offered. We reject both justifications. The graduate program should be reformulated as an elite program with clear foci to help recruit the best students. These students will demand reasonably secure financial support, and the Department must work with the University to craft multi-year financial packages. Course requirements will need to be adjusted for smaller student numbers, perhaps by offering courses every other year and by creating joint courses between the subfields. Although challenging, many graduate programs of anthropology have completed such revisions successfully. We believe that the Evolutionary Anthropology subfield has already taken many of these steps to create a model program, although it still needs to be more thoroughly integrated with the broader Department. Fewer students will ease funding difficulties, although the University will surely need to provide financial assistance for multi-year packages.

Another issue for the graduate program is its comprehensive examination structure. We recommend that the Department re-examine the procedures and, we hope, change it radically. Many programs across the country now focus on professional training, emphasizing the writing of grant proposals and publishable papers. Accepting fewer students with the expectations that most will complete the program eliminates the need to weed out weaker students from the large group. As expressed by several students, comprehensive examinations are psychologically traumatic, and they are also ineffective in evaluating the academic potential of students. The trend towards a different structure for measuring ability to succeed in doctoral programs across the country has proven to speed time to completion and to lessen periods of extreme stress for students.

We also have recommendations for the Undergraduate Program. This program is successful in many ways, but its growth has created substantial staffing problems within the Department. We conclude that as a result both of increasing student numbers and of increasing duties per students, the single staff person responsible for the Undergraduate students is simply overwhelmed. We hope that staffing support can be expanded. Furthermore we recommend strengthening the honors program in order to get undergraduates more involved in research. This too is the national trend at research universities. If fewer graduate students are admitted each year, faculty should have more time to supervise undergraduate honors work. Faculty should be given incentives to pursue this work with course release time and TA-ships, which are also a way to increase support for the graduate students. We encourage the Dean's office to find creative ways to reward people who are engaged in work with undergraduate students or in major research projects. Strengthening the Department requires a strong and clear statement of purpose AND a consideration of appropriate rewards and support from the administration for grants, service, and teaching to provide the faculty with incentives to achieve excellence.

Finally, we recommend some important improvements to facilities. Although the department's facilities are generally very good, the Dean's Office needs to provide funding to upgrade the lab facilities in the Anthropology Annex and in the Bandelier basement. These facilities are both ineffective and dangerous. Revitalizing the laboratory

space is crucial to being able to retain and hire first class faculty members, and the renovations will also provide needed research space for an improved graduate program and undergraduate honors program. Laboratory renovation should be attended to immediately.

Recommendations to the Department of Anthropology

1. Create a 10-year plan used to guide future hiring that will deserve strong support from the University. This plan should identify clearly the focus for each subfield and the themes that bind the subfields together within the overall objectives of the Department.
2. Reduce the size of the entering graduate class to perhaps 10 or 12 students and provide them with a multi-year package of support. Speed the time to degree and professionalize the teaching process by eliminating the comprehensive exams and replacing them with a new system that evaluates the student's abilities to write grant proposals and publish papers.

Recommendations to the University, in conjunction with the Department of Anthropology

1. Authorize the hiring of a new Director for the Ortiz enter and for a new Ethnology faculty member.
2. Strengthen the successful undergraduate program with an expanded honors program, better staff support, and recognition for faculty investment in students.
3. Place renovations of the Anthropology Annex and in the Bandelier basement as a high priority for capital improvement.