

**Final Report: Unit Review, Department of Anthropology, University of Regina
June 29, 2021**

Context/overview:

The Department of Anthropology at the University of Regina consists of six faculty members whose training and background are largely international as are their research interests. Overall, the nurturing and fostering of such a department at U of R has been a remarkable achievement. The faculty's international outlook, networks, and linguistic training are a major strength for a small unit and an asset to the department's, Faculty of Arts', and university's missions of research, service, and teaching. To a considerable extent, expertise of several department members focuses on Indigenous issues around the world, but also to a lesser degree in Canada. They are engaged with contemporary theoretical and regional debates in the discipline. The faculty appear to this review team to be succeeding admirably in virtually all aspects of their mission. Yet, the department's size and level of resources may complicate their ability to "be all they can be." Their reach within U of R, mainly through elective or service teaching, represents a tremendous service to the institution. At the same time, their size and relatively low number of majors are a potential risk as is the level of resources likely to be available in the near future. The department is poised to enhance its profile regionally and nationally within the discipline, in part due to new hiring, as well as by hosting the 2022 CASCA (Canadian Anthropology Society) conference and participating in CASCA's governance and activities in a more sustained manner. The future of the department looks solid but it should be steered with caution to maintain and build on its current strengths.

Teaching

Degree requirements are appropriate and compare nicely with similar degree requirements at similar universities in Canada. The undergraduate curriculum is organized by type of program (honours, major, minor) and offers a range of courses (from introductory to advanced undergraduate level) in Anthropology. The progression throughout the program is standard and at par with the progression found in similar programs at other universities. It is clear that the department is trying to do a lot with great success: offer breadth and depth in its program and ensure that students are introduced and trained in disciplinary canons as much as in more contemporary issues. Members of this department teach many service courses/electives for the university and are in contact with a large number of students from different programs. For a small department (6 full time faculty), Anthropology is making a very strong contribution to service teaching in the Faculty of Arts and indeed in the whole institution (nearly 1500 students in 2019). Students from outside the Faculty of Arts make up between 50-70%. On average, 30-40% of all undergraduates of the U of R take ANTH 100! This is impressive and is likely rather exceptional at mid-sized to large Canadian universities. Over the past 10 years, credit hours taught have increased by 25% which is greater than for Arts as a whole (+20%). The growth has come almost entirely at the 100-level. ANTH 100 is offered in various delivery modalities (face to face, evening, online, geared towards students in high school or living in remote communities). The department's students participate in international educational opportunities through U of R International; this is a good fit with the scope of Anthropology and particularly with the research interests and networks of this department.

In general, the programs offer a good balance of core courses (methods, theory, foundation courses, introductory courses) and electives. The SSR (Self-Study Report) shows that faculty members have been careful to update the curriculum, the course offerings, and the course contents so as to meet the current development of the disciplines, the interest of the students, and the expertise of new hires. It is apparent that the heavy commitment to teaching first year courses is not translating into number of majors and indeed, the focus on service teaching makes it challenging to deliver senior courses in the program. While the number of Anthropology majors has held somewhat steadier than the number of majors in the Faculty of Arts, attracting and keeping majors should remain a key priority.

It is clear that such a small number of faculty as found in the Department of Anthropology, however dedicated and talented they are, will never be able, and cannot be expected, to teach the high diversity of courses listed in the calendar. If courses are not taught year after year (due to lack of expertise or lack of interest/capability on the part of faculty) it might be worthwhile to consider removing them from the calendar. The sequencing of core courses must also be addressed so that students can move through their program in an orderly way while having options. It appears to be mainly the size of the faculty complement that makes delivering the program somewhat challenging, rather than the program itself.

Faculty members have considered these issues. They are aware that they cannot do it all and are hoping to revise the curriculum so as to render it more efficient and transparent to the students. The proposed program changes were not considered in detail by this review team. While we discussed the proposed curricular changes with colleagues at U of R, they were still somewhat nascent and emphasize “streams” and “modules” that may be confusing to students if not carefully implemented and communicated. Despite our questions to colleagues for more details, we did not really understand how beneficial the changes would be and what they would bring to the program. It may even be the case that the solution is not major changes to the program, but rather a renewed focus on teaching a fuller range of courses.

The training received by students is deep enough and broad enough to allow them entry to graduate programs in other universities. Many of the unit’s graduates have gone on to successful graduate studies elsewhere. Graduates have also gone on to work in local governments and organizations. In this sense, as well as through the service teaching mentioned above, the unit is certainly fulfilling and even excelling at its important mission of undergraduate teaching.

The graduate curriculum is practically non-existent: MA students are taking individual classes with their supervisor and designing programs à la carte, which most students find burdensome. Only a small number of students have been pursuing the MA over the past decade. Admission procedures for the Special Case MA program should be reviewed to increase efficiency. Some faculty members are hoping to develop a formal graduate curriculum and expand their MA enrolment. Given the resources required and the time constraints involved, it might be more beneficial to increase the enrolment in the major and honors program before trying to establish a full-fledged graduate program. This is particularly the case given that U of R majors are likely to be one of the main pools of potential applicants for a more robust local graduate program.

This is a department where students are very well taken care of: faculty members are readily available to them (as was confirmed by all the students we interviewed) and very helpful. The

personal attention that students receive from supervisors adds much to the quality of education they benefit from in this department. All the students we talked to praised faculty members for their availability, dedication, and expertise.

The course outlines that are appended to the SSR produced by the department reveal that students are exposed to and benefit from different methods of teaching and evaluations that not only serve to evaluate their work but give them yet another opportunity to learn from the class material. Workload in the various courses we looked at seems appropriate.

Research

All six department members have research agendas and most seek tri-council and other national and international funding opportunities. The five members whose duties include significant research have all received SSHRC funding at some point. On balance the research outputs of the Department would be considered of high quality but perhaps rather modest in number and reach. A significant strength in the department's research profile, which also has benefits for teaching, is the degree to which its faculty members maintain research programs in some of the classic world areas of anthropological interest (now including post-socialist Eastern Europe and Eurasia), while also participating in contemporary theoretical debates. Faculty members have great expertise in their respective fields. Some members of the Department of Anthropology, even junior members, have a strong research record, complete with grants and publications in major journals or presses. The department has begun to reengage with Indigenous research topics in Canada and this is a good thing.

It is essential that U of R support these faculty members and encourage them to secure research grants if the university is serious in seeking to increase its research profile. Currently, faculty members in Anthropology are fully committed in terms of their time for teaching, tutoring, advising, mentoring and administrative duties and do not have enough time to grow research funding and graduate programs and undertake research on a regular and sustained basis. The lack of regular research grants seriously affects faculty research productivity and has negative effects on their ability to attract/retain students in the programs offered by the department. Research funding does much to improve the profile of a department, internally and externally, and in turn has a direct positive effect on student enrolment in the programs, even at the undergraduate level. There is potential for collaboration among faculty on themes of common interest.

To a great extent, the research foci of U of R faculty differ from those of anthropologists at University of Saskatchewan. This is a strength; however, the geographical closeness of the two institutions may also afford opportunities for fruitful research collaborations and conversations. Over time, the department may wish to consider synergies with, or possibly even a joint graduate program with, the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at U of S.

Faculty complement

With six faculty members including a lecturer, the department is on the smaller end of middle-sized in comparison to other departments in the Faculty of Arts at U of R. In contrast, the department is relatively small in comparison with those at other medium-sized Canadian universities. Even within the Prairie Provinces, there are a number of universities (including newly accredited teaching universities) with a similar or larger complement of Anthropology faculty. Here is where U of R's sole focus on Cultural Anthropology (as opposed to a four-field view of Anthropology)

is a strength, as the coherence of a relatively small faculty complement is not diluted. While the department head did not express a dire need for more faculty, there is no question that adding another faculty member would help the department grow in other ways and enable it to better fulfill its mission. Hypothetically, with a faculty complement of 7 cultural anthropologists, the department would be competitive with much larger universities in the Prairie Provinces in respect of the Cultural Anthropology faculty complement. This would in turn make the prospects more favourable to increase majors, enhance service and service teaching, and perhaps build towards a graduate program. Given the relatively small faculty complement, and now that a tenure track lecturer has been secured, it will be important to focus any future hiring on research-active teacher-scholars with doctoral qualifications. This is particularly the case if the department aspires to eventually develop a graduate program. While all members of the current faculty complement will likely remain active, working, teacher-scholars for the next decade and more, there is a long-term risk to the department if their faculty complement is not revitalized with new members during the intervening period. This is highlighted by the fact that most members of the department are at the rank of Professor or Associate Professor, and there is only one Assistant Professor.

Staffing and resources

The department shares support staff and lacks a dedicated meeting space. This is likely adequate for current purposes but developing a new graduate program, in particular, would require more space and staff support.

Library resources seem adequate or better for a medium-sized university and the Anthropology-specific library web-page is well-organized and helpful. Care should be taken to retain access to important journals through the library and to coordinate the library's book purchases for Anthropology with faculty research and teaching interests.

The department has been able to build a budget from various sources to fund its activities at an adequate level, while noting that their ability to hire teaching assistants has not grown alongside the enrolment in their large courses. Overall, the financial resources available to the department, particularly their reliance on soft, non-core funding, appear rather precarious and may be a limiting factor on the department's ability to advance its mission. Nevertheless, the department is doing a lot with its current allocations of space, staff, and funding.

Students' perceptions

Much of what we learned from students about their experience in the program (both strengths and areas of concern) has been included in the above sections. We will not repeat the information here but wish to present other points raised by students during our visit to the department. Majors students very much like the expertise, accessibility, and dedication of faculty and staff. They were appreciative of the learning environment that was created by their professors. Even though we did not meet with non-majors students, it is obvious that there is a strong interest among them in courses offered by the Anthropology department. This is reflected in the high enrollment in Anthropology courses, particularly at the 100 level. On the other hand, program students worry about the small number of faculty, and the incidence that the small number has on the roster of courses offered, and on the diversity of expertise available to them.

Service

The department is clearly “punching above its weight” in terms of service. Most faculty members have been actively engaged in the administration, organization, and governance of U of R, URFA, and/or various learned societies and professional organizations (e.g., Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, CASCA, and Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America). Based on our discussions with U of R leaders and information from Professor Brigham, it is our impression that as a group they contribute proportionately much more to collegial governance and service at U of R than do most units. Furthermore, their outreach to diverse communities in Regina and Saskatchewan (including northern communities) is exemplary. Their overall focus fits well with the university’s new strategic plan, contributing to Indigenization at the University. Unlike many other departments at U of R, there is little overlap in regional and topical specializations with the corresponding department at the U of S. Nevertheless, the department has been a leader in maintaining good relations with anthropologists at U of S. Taken together, the department provides a huge benefit to the university in terms of its service, teaching, research, and public outreach.

Recommendations

While some minor changes in programming may be advisable, we would advise continued deliberation before making major changes to undergraduate programming. We are not taking a position on the proposed program changes that department members presented to us, except to say that any changes to the undergraduate program should encourage more streamlined degree completion and be easy to understand and implement.

In particular, developing a graduate (MA) program threatens to take time away from work in other areas and might not significantly benefit faculty research given the nature of ethnographic fieldwork. It is not clear that the department would be able to sustain a viable graduate cohort intake without significant new financial, capital, and human resources, in what has become quite a competitive space, with only a given number of qualified potential applicants who wish to pursue graduate work in Anthropology in Saskatchewan. Building a new graduate program at this time might be asking too much of faculty who are already stretched.

It may be advisable to reduce slightly the number of sections of Anth 100 offered by the department to offer a broader range of senior courses, so as to assist majors in making their way through the program in an efficient way. Perhaps this could be coupled with teaching larger sections to free up faculty resources, while reaching a similar total number of students. This would likely require additional or more targeted TA support.

If a future faculty line becomes available, the department should consider hiring a researcher with a primary focus in North America, whether on Indigenous issues or other contemporary topics. This would complement the primarily international expertise of most current faculty members and perhaps allow for engagement with Indigenous North America and scholars working in that area, helping U of R meet its Indigenization goals, as well. (The expertise of cultural anthropologists on Indigenous issues in North America is currently not well represented in Indigenous Studies departments in Western Canada, or within First Nations University of Canada, so there may be some space for expanding into this type of work; perhaps this would also open doors with FNUC or other centres of Indigenous scholarship in Western Canada and beyond.)

Care should be taken to maintain and consolidate budget, library resources, staffing, and space. The department runs in a highly efficient manner and teaches many students through a variety of modalities. Cuts, whatever the intention, would put the department's ability to meet its goals and expand its profile at risk. Aside from this threat, the department's future looks bright.

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