Assessment Plan – Mini Progress Report

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
September 23, 2005

The department continues to build on the program review submitted in January of 2004. One key aspect of that program is our continuing commitment to providing quality off-campus cross-cultural learning opportunities for our students. The newest of these department approved programs is the Westmont in Mexico (WIM) program—offered every fall semester. In this its second year of operation, our department chair, Dr. Laura Montgomery, is serving as the director. Using a well-established instrument, we will be able to evaluate students’ progress in terms of multicultural and cross-cultural awareness. The instrument was administered at the beginning of the current semester and will be given again at the conclusion of the semester, thus providing us with some “before and after” measures.

The January 2004 report also noted that because of the growth of off-campus opportunities, it was felt that some restrictions on the number of programs our majors can realistically participate in should be discussed. Since that time, the department has adopted a policy limiting our students to the Urban Program in San Francisco plus one additional off-campus program (approved by the College but not operated by the College). A total of 8 units from the latter program will be accepted toward the major.

The department continues to refine the use of a survey instrument administered to graduating seniors in order to assess “student learning outcomes.” In order to enhance the return rate of these questionnaires, it has been suggested that this year they be administered during a class meeting of our Senior Seminar.

With regard to evaluation of the Senior Seminar, we remain uncertain as to how best to gather evidence indicating clear progress in the areas of student learning and overall program effectiveness. Our primary evidence continues to be the quality of the required capstone, integrative, senior paper. Departmental faculty remark that these papers demonstrate, for the most part, a high level of intellectual and methodological sophistication.

Class projects in other upper division courses also give evidence of a high level of academic achievement as well as commendable involvement with local community organizations and agencies. Here are some representative student comments regarding the value to them personally and academically of their participation in group projects in one specific upper division course:

In giving my personal opinion of the project we have been working on this entire semester regarding the homeless situation in Santa Barbara, I have a difficult time knowing where to begin. From lacking any insight at all on the issue to being confronted with the problem on many different levels, I can say that I have been transformed.
This class has given me a passion to help those in need and I truly believe that even I can make a difference.

Before I took this course, I never realized how many different ethnicities and cultures existed in America today and how important it is to take race and ethnicity into account. . . . Through learning about diversity, I have become much more sensitive to the differences that are all around me. This has challenged me to take action, mostly in terms of becoming educated about the specific needs, values, and struggles that different people face.

After researching the issue of homelessness for a semester, poverty is no longer an abstract issue, separate from my life. Instead, my concern for homelessness has evolved into a personal concern. Homelessness is more than an issue to be dealt with; it is a compilation of faces.

These classes are something that I will carry with me for life, the knowledge that I have gained from these classes will accompany me throughout graduate school and in my profession. More importantly, the life lessons and the growing that I have experienced through these last two years and from these classes will last a lifetime.

It is difficult to quantify these kinds of student responses, but they convey, perhaps better than statistical analyses, the kind of “student outcomes” that we strive for. When they are presented to us in such personal, meaningful ways, they encourage us in the pursuit of our goals and demonstrate that evaluation is more than quantifiable data.

Since the submission of the January 2004 Program Review, we have instituted (along with other departments) a strategy of (selective) senior level interviews in order to ascertain student satisfaction with their overall college experience at Westmont, including their satisfaction with the major. Admittedly, these interviews lead to largely subjective, impressionistic findings because the interviews are unstructured, open-ended and far ranging. Nevertheless, they provide significant insights and suggestions that could eventuate in program modifications. At present, each faculty member conducts only one or two of these interviews. On-going departmental discussion could lead to an expanded number of senior interviewees.

These senior interviews indicate that satisfaction levels remain high, although departmental instruction in research methods and use of sophisticated computer software remain problematic for some students. The recently required course, MA 5, Introduction to Statistics, --required in place of an existing quantitative methods course, appears to have been instituted with minimal complaint.

The relatively new required course, AN 192/SOC 192, Extracurricular Departmental Activities, has been especially well received. The one aspect of the course that is notably popular is the annual departmental, off-campus retreat, which combines academic and spiritual benefits for both students and faculty. Also popular are the
occasional off-campus department-wide field trips—to places like the Dream Center in Los Angeles. Budget restraints do not permit more of these field experiences, where faculty and students interact outside the traditional classroom, on-campus environment.