

Response to Department of Anthropology 10–Year–Review
3 November 2023

I want to express deep gratitude on behalf of the Anthropology faculty, staff, and students for the thorough, thoughtful, and constructive review of our programs. We were honored to have such an excellent review committee, and are thankful for the immense time, labor, and care they expended in meeting with us and reviewing our work. We were pleased by the broadly positive tone of the review, and appreciate that the reviewers emphasized our “mighty” strengths in research, undergraduate and graduate teaching, mentorship, and service despite being relatively small in comparison to peer R1 Universities. Our response will focus largely on their recommendations, some of which we have already tried to address in ongoing interventions. Overall, we are committed to creating initiatives that will maintain current areas of excellence and strengthen points of weakness.

The review committee identified **six** areas for intervention: (1) A 5–year plan for multiple strategic, early and mid–career faculty hires; (2) Interventions designed to center the humanity and life experiences of all members of the department; (3) Increasing transparency in faculty life; (4) Provide flexibility and empowerment to graduate students so that they are at the core of the department’s intellectual life; (5) Implementation of administrative management that grows staff capacities and communication and builds community; (6) Expand opportunities for undergraduate research experience and engagement.

We solicited responses to the report in several forums: an open discussion in the June faculty meeting, in sub–disciplinary meetings, and a faculty listening session. Individuals were also encouraged to provide feedback to the strategic planning committee directly (Gonzalez, Govindrajan, & Grant). This process generated thoughtful feedback on the report and creative suggestions for how our department might move forward with the recommendations of the 10 year review committee’s report and above targeted interventions. Many of the interventions the review committee identified address cross–cutting themes and we thus group the report into four core areas: **(1)** Faculty Attrition and the need for hires; **(2)** Graduate student funding and intellectual life; **(3)** Creating a equitable, inclusive, and supportive

department climate; and **(4)** Building the capacity of department staff and enhancing communication across faculty and staff.

FACULTY ATTRITION AND THE NEED FOR MULTIPLE HIRES:

The report noted an atmosphere of *"anxiety, discouragement, exhaustion, and resignation"* among faculty *"at every level and rank"*. One reason for this pervasive mood, they argue, is the *"continued attrition of faculty over the last 10 years—the selective departure of senior faculty... as well as assistant and associate professors... and the imminent departure (through retirement) of 2–3 in the next few years."* We are grateful for the committee's recognition of the immense toll that this deep and steady attrition has taken on us, including on *"our health and well-being"*. In the past ten years, we have lost 8 faculty members to retirement (Mimi Kahn, Steve Harrell, Don Grayson, Julie Stein, Kathleen O'Connor, Lorna Rhodes, Angela Close, James Feathers); 4 faculty to other units on campus (Sasha Welland, Danny Hoffman, Jean Dennison, Arzoo Osanloo); 5 faculty to other institutions (Alison Wylie, Sareeta Amrute, Janelle Taylor, Michael Perez, Megan Carney); 4 faculty members who have moved a portion of their lines to other units on campus (Sara Gonzalez, Radhika Govindrajan, Celia Lowe, James Pfeiffer); and 1 faculty member to an untimely death (Sam Dubal). 15 of these losses—13 FTEs in total—have been in the Sociocultural sub-discipline which has historically supported the highest load of undergraduate teaching in the department. As the report starkly notes, such heavy attrition, fueled in some part by *"the longstanding histories of divisiveness in the department,"* means that the department **"is facing serious risks to its national reputation and its capacity to sustain a productive graduate training program."**

One outcome of this slow bleeding of the department is the effect it has had on our ability to offer and teach undergraduate and graduate classes. The Anthropology major at UW is among the highest in demand in the College of Arts and Sciences. Currently, the department's BA and BS majors and related options (Medical Anthropology & Global Health, Anthropology of Globalization, Archaeological Sciences, Indigenous Archaeology, and Human Evolutionary Biology) enroll 538 undergraduates in addition to 50 minors, a figure that the report notes is *"high compared to other anthropology departments in the United States"*. In addition to our robust undergraduate program, We have 48 graduate students across our three Ph.D

programs in Sociocultural anthropology, Anthropological Archaeology, and Biocultural Anthropology and M.A program in Archaeological Heritage. Our undergraduate and graduate students have gone on to successful careers in multiple fields, including academia, health and medicine, law, cultural resource management, technology and user experience, museum studies, public service, data science, and business.

However, our shrinking faculty numbers threatens the longevity and sustainability of our teaching programs. As the report notes, the faculty who remain in the department have had to shoulder growing teaching and mentoring responsibilities in addition to their research and service commitments. Given the success of our undergraduate major and the volume of students enrolled in classes, the shrinking of our faculty creates problems in terms of having enough faculty to staff classes and offer classes regularly and predictably. It has also become difficult to staff our required graduate courses while simultaneously maintaining our teaching commitments to the undergraduate program. In short, **we are stretched dangerously thin and our students are suffering from scarcity of faculty mentors and unpredictable schedules for required graduate core courses as a result of our steady attrition. These issues are particularly acute in the Sociocultural Anthropology program.**

As the report notes, it is urgent that college administration commit to a 5–year plan to hire multiple, early and **mid-career faculty** if the Department is to maintain its national reputation. Stressing an emphasis on hiring more senior faculty speaks to the committee’s recognition that the department needs faculty who have the time, energy, and position to “remake the department”. Hiring mid-career faculty is especially important given the chilly climate within the department, which has significantly impacted the ability for junior, and specifically BIPOC faculty, to participate fully in conversations about the future of the department. As the report notes, the task of making the Department of Anthropology “whole again cannot rest solely on the shoulders of the chair or legwork done solely by the graduate students or untenured faculty.” The review committee’s recommendation for senior hires echoes multiple prior demands for senior hires made by the Department. Indeed, the urgent need for these hires was recognized by the former Dean of Social Sciences (Lovell), who, during the 2021–2022 academic year, had promised a senior, outside hire designed to fill the Anthropology Chairship. This promise was made following the Anthropology Chair Search Committee report, which called for an external, senior hire due to the hostile department climate.

When I negotiated in good faith to accept the position of the Chair of Anthropology, the Dean in my discussions made a promise of 6 faculty hires (rank unspecified) over the tenure of my Chairship. The department calls on the College to honor this commitment by providing us hires every year over the next 5–years. We also firmly support the review committee’s recommendation that early and mid–career hires are essential for addressing the increasingly unsustainable teaching, mentoring, and service burden placed on current faculty.

GRADUATE PROGRAM

The 10–Year–Review Committee Report recognizes that our graduate program attracts strong students and that our graduates go on to prestigious jobs in and outside of academia. Furthermore, the research of our graduate students is internationally recognized within the field of anthropology. However, the life of our graduate students and our program is negatively impacted by: 1) inability to **guarantee funding** for students; 2) “**siloing**” of students within their mentor network and sub–discipline; and 3) trickle–down effects of **tension** between faculty and sub–disciplines. In particular, there is inordinate pressure on junior faculty and faculty of color to meet career development and mentorship responsibilities.

The Chair negotiated ten five–year packages for graduate students. However this is not enough to sustain our graduate program. Therefore, we prioritize the following actions in this response:

Guaranteed five–year packages. Anthropology faculty across sub–disciplines whole–heartedly support the review committee’s suggestion to implement guaranteed five–year funding packages for graduate students. In their report, the review committee notes that there is no reason not to do this **now**. We note that declining TA commitments from the College to the Department threaten the long–term feasibility of funding graduate students through TA–ships, especially if we do not have enough FTEs (see previous section) to keep the number of TAs currently allocated. We strongly request that the College match the TA–ships to our undergraduate course demands.

Programmatic interventions. To address siloing and quality of life we plan a year long **symposium** (3 credit course) for all incoming graduate students that covers some interdisciplinary theory and methods; professionalization; and a colloquium that the students themselves help to structure. Our Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC) will organize sponsored social activities that pre–COVID attracted students, staff, and

faculty. We also plan to reinvigorate the graduate STAR conference, integrating feedback from graduate students that faculty attend and/or participate in the conference. We acknowledge the need to shift faculty (and graduate student) expectations around graduate teaching; specifically, graduate students should be eligible to serve as TAs classes across sub-disciplines for current 100 and 200-level courses. This will help train future practitioners with interdisciplinary expertise.

One concrete step we will explore is to merge **faculty service roles** related to graduate support which are currently separate: Resources and Sub-faculty Appointments.

Regarding the Review Committee's suggestion to increase opportunities for undergraduate student research, we need to implement a transparent system of financial support for graduate mentors for undergraduates. Graduate students have pointed out that undergraduate mentoring by graduate students is currently done on an ad-hoc basis; transparency around this labor is urgent for equity.

DEPARTMENT CLIMATE: CREATING AN EQUITABLE, INCLUSIVE, AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Several sections of the report deal with "deeply rooted divisions within the department" that, over the years, have created a "toxic" work environment that is "stressful and extremely uncomfortable" and "inhibits efficient and positive functioning". The reviewers note that this climate adversely affects not just faculty but also students and staff. In particular this reputation sullies the names of our individual faculty, staff, and students, which inhibits our community members' ability to work with other units across campus. As the report also states, these divisions are long-standing, as are departmental efforts to address them and to remake our community. The work of "changing the chemistry of the department" (as the report puts it) is active and ongoing, but largely unsupported.

We add that the climate in the department perpetuates feelings associated with the discipline's colonial legacy—past and present. The work of transforming the department can be uncomfortable as it calls on practitioners to reassess the history of this discipline and to respond to the need for ethically informed approaches to anthropology that recognize the humanity of historically excluded and devalued peoples. Our graduate students represent the future of our discipline. They are actively

remaking anthropology, yet as they bring in what they cite as “historically dismissed identities” they report being excluded from the department’s intellectual community. As they note: what then is the point of being in a discipline and department refusing to change?

In the past ten years, we have worked with numerous facilitators including, most recently, Dr. Irma McLaurin and Dr. Anu Taranath to remake our departmental community and address the hostile climate BIPOC and untenured faculty have reported. Dr. Irma McLaurin was also retained to provide specific support for Black, Indigenous and persons of color in the department, which included retreats and both one-on-one and group professional coaching, as well as attendance at meetings involving upper administration and BIPOC faculty. In the last academic year, the outgoing Dean of Social Science (Lovell) also provided funding to host a year-long seminar focused on the intellectual life of the department. The proposal for this seminar series came from then-junior, untenured faculty members and was designed to increase opportunities for intellectual exchange across the sub-disciplinary communities and also introduce graduate students to contemporary, ethically-engaged research in Anthropology. However, the lack of continued funding and explicit support from the College to continue active facilitation and interventions designed to enhance the intellectual life of the department remain roadblocks to building a collegial department community that supports the humanity of colleagues, students, and staff.

It is clear that we need continued support from the College to provide ongoing facilitation and faculty coaching as the divisions between faculty and departmental climate remain chilling. As the report notes, unless directly addressed “perceived inequities and retention will continue to plague” the department and community writ-large. Already in the last 10 years, department efforts to recruit and retain faculty from historically excluded communities have been stymied by both lack of resources for faculty and issues of department climate. Four BIPOC faculty have left the department, either resigned their positions or moved their faculty lines fully to other departments within the university, with two additional moving portions of their lines to other campus units. Excepting the Department Chair, there remain no BIPOC full professors, three associate BIPOC faculty, with “other other faculty members who may be seen as contributing to diversity, equity and inclusion efforts are either non-tenured assistant professors or are non-tenure-track faculty.” As the report states: “ This created a

perceptual division in the Department where faculty stemming from diverse communities see themselves as relatively powerless, and at risk in the department, particularly in situations where sub-disciplinary differences relating to philosophical controversies in the conduct of the department arise.” We echo the review committee in saying the *time is now* to support our department. The college’s support for both active facilitation and the addition of an ombuds person or persons within the department who are trained and capable of conflict resolution and ensuring safety in reporting is urgently needed. We strongly support this recommendation, and would add that anyone hired to take on this task should also support faculty as they engage in strategic planning for the department going forward.

The report notes that the department’s scholarly siloes also disrupt our ability to grow and thrive. Based on suggestions from the review committee and faculty members, we propose four complementary actions to resolve department climate: 1) the creation of a three-person Executive Committee, composed of a member of each sub-discipline, that can assist the Chair and create open channels of communication between the Chair and faculty; 2) specific opportunities for “humanity centered” interventions that create support— including coaching and access to development funds for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, faculty with disability, and faculty without tenure who, as the report notes, are disproportionately affected by the departmental climate; 3) creating increased transparency around administrative decisions, including tenure and promotion, teaching responsibilities, and service assignments, and departmental budgets (this might be aided by the creation of an Executive Committee, as noted in point 1); 4) a **facilitator join faculty meetings once per quarter** to help us with communication around strategic planning and action on the items outlined in this response.

In regards to items (3) and (4), our goal is to specifically implement transparency around promotion criteria, equitable service and teaching loads, support for BIPOC , 1st gen, women, non-binary and other historically excluded faculty who face added burdens in mentoring and teaching, and implementation of structures of support for faculty without tenure to minimize precarity and maximize feelings of belonging. Department faculty have attempted to address many of these issues, yet the report specifically notes that the lack of administrative support for teaching faculty (who shoulder large teaching loads while also conducting cutting-edge research) only exacerbates the inequity in the department. We suggest that the college

administration provide financial support to address these issues, for example, providing teaching faculty professional development funds to attend conferences or participate in pedagogy workshops that can strengthen their expertise. Similarly, enabling the department to enact a transparent system of differentially weighting of teaching and service obligations and ensuring that distributions of time and effort are distributed across tenure-track, teaching, and jointly-appointed faculty would ensure that early career and mid-career faculty can thrive in the department and UW. We also strongly recommend increasing the length of appointments for teaching faculty to the maximum allowed by the Faculty Code since this will reduce their precarity.

INCREASING STAFF CAPACITY:

The report noted the need to implement “intentional administrative management that seeks to grow staff capacities and communication, as well as build community among both staff and faculty.” We reiterate these demands, particularly at a time when we are sorely understaffed. Due to critical understaffing across the department since 2020, many of our normal functions (accounting & reimbursements, academic advising, and administration) remain seriously delayed. Over the last three years, it took two years before we were able to find stability in the department’s administrator position, one year to replace the Graduate Program Coordinator with a permanently appointed employee, and nine months to hire a Budget/Fiscal Analyst. While the department was supplied with interim support, understaffing from the lack of permanent employees resulted in untenable delays in department business, including: processing faculty requests for leave; hiring of graduate and undergraduate employees and research assistants; processing reimbursements and spending down of existing grants; grant applications and administration; processing TA appointments in a timely manner, etc. Each of these extended vacancies has also put an additional burden on existing, permanent and temporary staff as coverage is expanded, scope creep enters their roles, all of which increases the potential for burnout.

While we now have permanent staff in the above three roles, currently the Anthropology Advising Office remains critically understaffed following the retirement of our Academic Services Director. This gap in advising is resulting in serious impacts

to the department's ability to advise and serve our over 500 majors. Areas affected include the processing of undergraduate requests to declare Anthropology as their major (resulting in the erosion of enrollments in our major), conducting timely degree audits leading to graduation delays, and providing regular support for classroom scheduling and related administrative issues. With the failure of the recent search for an Academic Services Director, we risk further deleterious impacts to our undergraduate program. As it stands, we are already noting the significant decline of majors over the last 2 years. While the search for a permanent Academic Services Director is re-opened a second time and we remain hopeful we can fill this position immediately, the reduction in hours serviced by currently employed academic counseling staff is short an *additional 1.0 FTE*. If our thriving undergraduate program is to remain at its current size, and we wish to ensure our advising staff is properly resourced for the current size of the major, we need an immediate 1.0 FTE academic counseling staff position, in addition to the vacant Academic Service Director position.

CONCLUSION

Once again, we would like to express our gratitude to the review committee for their tremendous labor as well as the perspicacity they brought to the process. We emphasize the considerable consistency of core challenges across this review and the one from 2010, namely: severe underfunding of faculty and staff positions and graduate student TA-ships relative to the teaching and service load the department performs for the College; a hostile and demoralized climate amongst faculty, students, and staff. We recognize a history of severe underfunding of faculty, staff, and graduate TA positions and this has reached a breaking point for our department. We can start with small things, but we need commitment from above and within our department for the following: A departmental lecture series, formalizing guaranteed graduate student funding packages, restructuring of program requirements, and opportunities for professional development and graduate mentoring. Our response asks for many of the same requests made by faculty and the prior Chair (Shell-Duncan) in 2010. The department looks forward to working together to creatively reimagine the future of our department, one that builds on our collective strengths and invigorates the intellectual life of our department and the health of the multiple communities we serve.