Anthropology Careers Readiness Network

Department Advisory Initiative Readiness Criteria Research

May 2025

UNT
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

Project Goals

Departmental Advisory Initiative (DAI)

Created to advise programs on implementing or strengthening their applied programs

Needs screening mechanism to identify to departments ready to implement meaningful change.

Project Goal:

Identify criteria that DAI can use as a “readiness assessment” of Anthropology Departments.

Original DAI Criteria

Vision and Motivation

•Motivation for contacting DAI is related to applied/practice
•Open to the work of practicing/applied anthropologist
•Cohesion within the department
•Instructors work together collaboratively
•Degree of commitment to a process of change
•Interest in department change or incremental improvement
•Consensus within the department or at least majority
•Department members see each other as peers

Structural Readiness

- Have mechanisms to ensure sustainability
- Ensure time and space to do the work
- Willingness to commit resources
- Committed to a year-long program
- Designate individuals or a core team who will oversee changes
- Aware that this will be a lot of work
- Consider who is on the initial call to a department: chair, multiple individuals
- Track employment of Alumni

Research Design

Interviews were conducted with department members to

- Identify key criteria for readiness and
- Test criteria suggested by the DAI members

A total of 12 interviews were completed across nine schools

The nine schools hosted departments of Anthropology as well as "merged" departments (Anthropology with Sociology, etc.)

Interview data were transcribed and subject to content analysis

Content codes reflected initial DAI criteria as well as emergent themes

Research Participants

Interviews Completed

- University of Delaware
- West Chester University (Pennsylvania)
- Missouri State University
- Oregon State University
- Texas A&M University
- University of Denver
- University of Kentucky
- University of Michigan
- San Diego State University

No Response

- American University (Washington DC)
- Indiana University

Agenda - Presentation of Findings

I. Faculty Attitudes, Understandings, and Values
Sarah Heinemeier and Samantha Pickett

II Resources
Jake Rand Nirvik Thapa

III Overall Comparison of Universities
Amber Davis & Jamie Allen

IV The DAI Experience
Jake Richard & Nirvik Thapa

V Feedback and Ideas
Caliopy Glaros, Geoff Rose, and P.J. Magness

VI Summary of Findings and Recommendations

I Faculty Attitudes, Understandings and Values

Sarah Heinemeier and Samantha Pickett

Faculty Attitudes, Understandings, and Values

Motivation

- ✓ Identity as an "applied" versus "theoretical" program
- ✓ Motivation also may be a function of:
  - ✓ University pressures
  - ✓ Career readiness
  - ✓ Outside perspective
  - ✓ Curriculum changes

"All the faculty are aware that applied anthropology is *not something exotic*… **The entire conversation changed** as a result of their visit and how they presented applied anthropology."

Summary

- ❑ All Department describes a sense of urgency in ensuring it can attract students
- ❑ Many Department describes an interest in student prospects post-graduation
- ❑ A few Department had already initiated career readiness or post-graduation supports or services

Faculty Attitudes, Understandings, and Values

Cohesion, Consensus, and Interest in Change

- ✓ May need explicit examples or scenarios
- ✓ Department members support (or at least do not oppose) pursuing the DAI opportunity
- ✓ There is limited intra-departmental conflict
- ✓ Unified strategic plan or “vision”

"We're not ready for a program like this... I think the reality is the department is not in a place where there’s agreement about who we are, what we’re doing, or what we want to do. And it makes doing something like DAI really challenging. We were excited about it in the beginning, but when we tried to bring it to the faculty, it became clear that there wasn’t the kind of shared vision or energy that would allow us to take advantage of it.”

Summary

- ❑ Many Departments could identify key faculty (such as Chair, Coordinators, or Content Leads) support the application
- ❑ Some Department can describe its strategic vision

Faculty Attitudes, Understandings, and Values IV

Commitment

- ✓ Department faculty willing to accept roles and complete tasks
- ✓ The number of active faculty is variable
- ✓ “Key voices" or "influencers" in the department
- ✓ Chair support is vital

> “Absolutely critical. He praised the whole process He was full-on supportive-- not only with funds… but with just support of all the things we were doing.”
> -Participant response when asked about chair support

Summary

- ❑ Most Department Chairperson endorses the project and is willing to spend “political capital” to ensure it is successful
- ❑ Most Department has a DAI Leadership Team who commits to roles and tasks
- ❑ Department must evaluate which faculty members are willing to devote time

Faculty Attitudes, Understandings, and Values

Collaborations and Peer Relationships

Productive relationships and collaborations outside the departments

- ✓ University resources
- ✓ Other Departments
- ✓ Alumni
- ✓ Internships or job opportunities

"We're really trying to develop career pathways and make that clear to our students."

"We want to be better at making sure that everybody is ready for employment."

"They're already doing applied work—internships, community projects—but it's not framed that

Summary

- ❑ Several Departments had established relationships with University resource offices or staff
- ❑ Some Department has positive working relationships with affiliated Departments
- ❑ A few Department works with or is engaged with for-profit, non-profit, or governmental projects
- ❑ In a few Departments Alumni are active as liaisons to post-University careers or internships

Faculty Attitudes, Understandings, and Values

Emergent Themes

- ✓ University Values Applied Anthropology as a Discipline
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Student Interest
- ✓ Practicality
- ✓ Plan for support

"We're implementing changes across syllabi, websites, student handbooks, vision statements."

"We want a future for anthropology."

They really did see the value, and *the students, they were just incredibly excited."*

II: Resources and Client Feedback

Jake Richard & Nirvik Thapa

Original DAI CRITERIA

1. Have mechanisms to ensure sustainability

2. Ensure time and space to do the work

3. Willingness to commit resources

4. Committed to a year-long program

5. Designate individuals or a core team who will oversee changes

6. Aware that this will be a lot of work

7. Consider who is on the initial call to a department: chair, multiple individuals

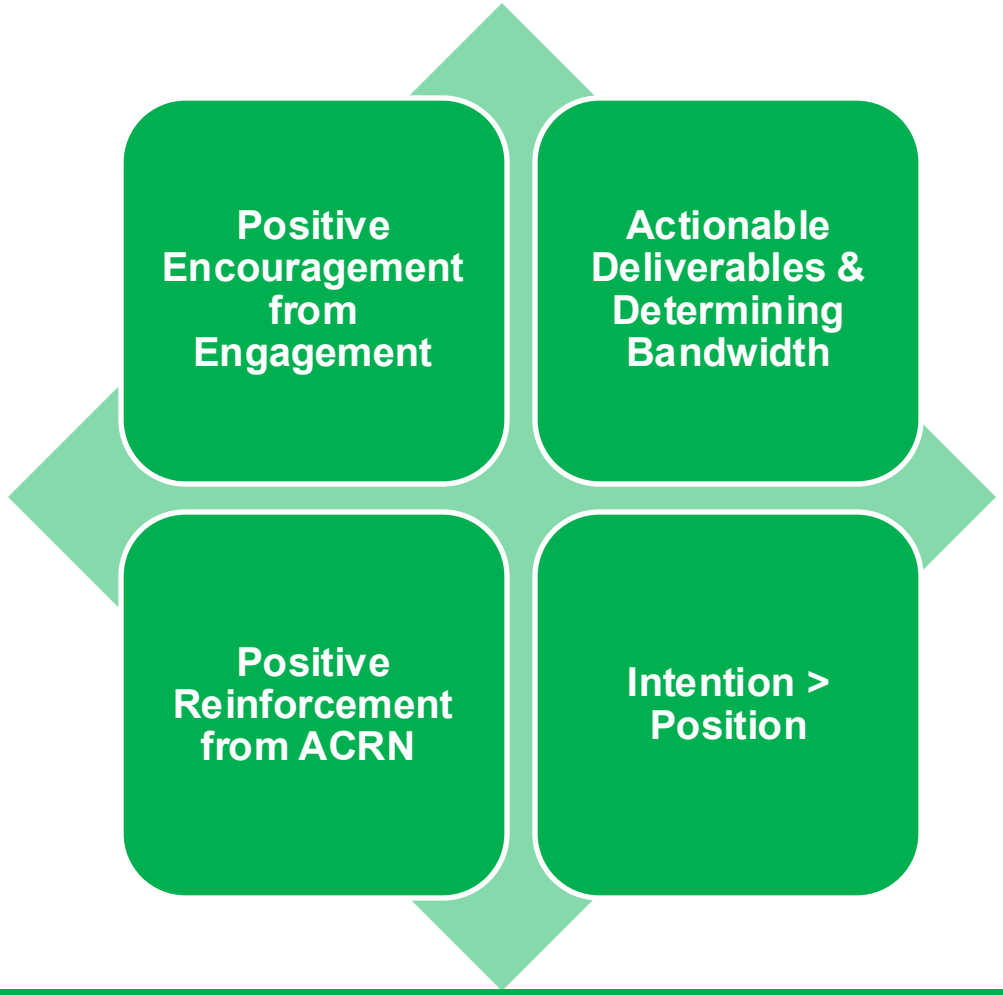
CHALLENGES TO OBTAIN RESOURCES

Program/Department Classification

Conveying the benefits of DAI Participation

Facilitating Departmental Cohesion and Alignment

SUSTAINABLE MECHANISMS & PROGRAM IMPACT



PROGRAM IMPACT & CONSEQUENCE

Pushed faculty to assess their expertise + positionality.

Created better advocacy opportunities

Generated more “applied” engagement

III Comparison of Universities

Jamie Allen and Amber Davis

About Our Team

Jamie Allen

My name is Jamie, and I am an applied Cherokee anthropologist (ABT) with applied experience in activism and racial justics

Amber Davis

My name is Amber, and I am a MA in Interaction Design (IxD) candidate with a background in communication design.

Comparing Universities

We reviewed 12 interviews conducted with 9 universities

Ready

We found there were many variabilities within the departments we found ready or were already in the process

Not Ready

We found there were a few commonalities between the departments that we found were unprepared.

Variability in Ready Departments

6 universities appear ready

U of Delaware **Texas A&M U** **Oregon State U**

U of Denver **U of Kentucky** **West Chester U**

strong focus on applied work	Oregon State, Texas A&M, and Kentucky
less faculty resistance	Oregon State, Texas A&M, Denver
institutional constraints	Texas A&M, Oregon State, Denver
better alumni engagement	Texas A&M
faculty resistance	Delaware, West Chester
applied work seen as supplementary	Delaware, West Chester
alumni engagement	Texas A&M
Institutional constraints	Delaware, West Chester

Commonalities of Unready

3 universities were not ready

U of Michigan

San Diego State U

Missouri State U

- No clear definition of Applied Anthropology
- Preoccupation with departmental conflict
- Research Tier Level

Cannot Define Applied

First sign of an **unready** program:
unclear on how to define **applied anthropology**

> Never quite sure what people mean when they talk about applied anthropology because it's usually, I mean, it's usually defined in terms of like, who gives you your money? Who pays your paycheck? If you're working for Ford, it's applied. If you're working for a university, it's not. I mean, in terms of the teaching, It's probably, with our students, more relevant to think about like hands-on work versus lectures or readings.
>
> – *University of Michigan participant*

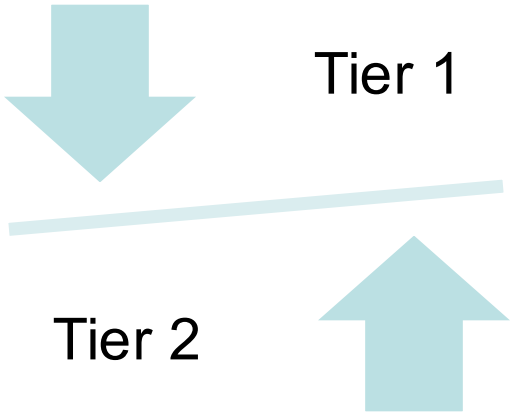
Preoccupied With Conflict

Second sign of an **unready** program:
preoccupation with **conflict** in lieu of problem solving

> This person sort of dropped the mic and retired sort of for medical reasons, but also just kind of a in a rather showy F-you, to be honest. At least it felt like it to me of just, you know, right before the semester.
> "Nope. Not teaching. Bye."
> And so we were going to have a lecturer teach that course. But then no one signed up for it, so it didn't get offered.
>
> – *University of Michigan participant*

Research Tier

A *possible* sign of an **unready** program:
Research Tier Level



Although this could be an outlier, 2 of the 3 that we found unready were Tier 2 Research schools, while 5 of the 6 ready schools were found to be Tier 1 Research schools. This may be an early indicator to do a more in-depth interview.

IV DAI Experience

Feedback

Jake Richard & Nirvik Thapa

Constructive Feedback:

Clients Currently Enrolled in DAI Program

“Worth our Time” Department Agreement and Compliance	The addition of DAI topics upon already established curriculum was daunting and not seen as “worth the time” of professors who saw the expansion as being “outside” of their internal expectations and “not being paid for it.”
“More than Reporting Sessions” Improving Check-In meetings	Respondents suggested that meetings with DAI consultants be more collaborative with more direct guidance be provided in order to traverse unanticipated issues. More frequent meetings were suggested where practical advice was provided to keep the implementation process on track as well as how to address and troubleshoot new problems.

Constructive Feedback:

Clients Currently Enrolled in DAI Program

"Not good at selling themselves" Marketing and Branding	Branding the program with more of a "Career Readiness" angle was something important to departments, yet information/clear steps to do so were not provided by DAI personnel. Clients report that they are not "good at selling themselves" to stakeholders within their university and would appreciate assistance on how to show the need for DAI to internal stakeholders.
Interdisciplinary Collaboration Requesting more guidance	Respondents reported that they were unsure on how to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration between departments to produce true applied projects.

The DAI Upfront Contract

Purpose	Ensuring a Smooth Implementation
Creates clarity for clients regarding expectations, responsibilities, and timelines. Ensures implementation success and avoids potential conflicts beforehand. Confirms that the proper time commitment, curriculum adaptations, and resource allocations are available and will be committed. Increased client buy-in as confirmation is made on what will be expected.	After the qualification meeting with client, a personalized timeline is established marking milestones in the implementation process. Expectations and Compliance are key and detailed in the Contract. Timelines are established in order to ensure a final cohesive integration. Meetings will include a personalized analysis of program progress as well as a collaborative plan of action when addressing roadblocks.

Potential Improvements

Production and Distribution of White Papers	Topics: - Incentivizing Decision Makers - Incentivizing Professor Buy-In
Respondents indicated that being armed with documentation and support from ACRN empowers them to advocate for the program.	- Quantitative and Qualitative - Metrics on Program Success - Explanation of Deliverables like curriculum modules, case studies, or syllabi that professors can immediately adapt. - The importance of Applied Anthropology in career readiness.

V Feedback and Ideas

Caliopy Glaros, Geoff Rose & P.J. Magness

Presented by…

Caliopy Glaros

M.A. Candidate, Applied Anthropology (Tourism & Philanthropy)
Founder & CEO I Philanthropy without Borders

PJ Magness

M.A. Candidate, Interdisciplinary Studies

Geoff Rose

M.S. Candidate, Applied Anthropology (Business & Technology)
Project Manager | HKS, Inc.

V Feedback and Ideas

"Everyone thinks they're 'applied.' It's almost insulting to suggest that anyone is an unapplied anthropologist…"

ACRN should provide:

- One pager materials on process roadmap, including timeline and resource expectations.
- Case Study (1 page) of a successful institution.
- Recorded webinar on ACRN and their approach to applied anthropology
- Potential questions in the initial interview:
  - "How important is it to faculty that students in your department find jobs in industry…?"
  - "When was the last time the curriculum was significantly changed? Describe the process…"

Communication and Materials

"I might start with Zoom meetings[...] Have a cheat sheet and[...] have someone come and talk about the initiative[...] explain it and explain their goal."

Having an ACRN representative available to directly talk to whole departments in Q&As was suggested, along with providing easy-to-digest, 1-page materials that help summarized the ACRN and its objectives. Reference back to materials on the ACRN website that departments could use as guidebooks to editing their programs.

"It's also expensive for them[...] to put on a workshop for every single organization, and then everyone has to attend. But what if they just did a recorded one? And then just said, well, here's our link, and this is where we define the terms."

Separating out communications into asynchronous formats would help to disseminate the concept of the ACRN and work around schedule conflicts.

- Deliver documents explaining the mission of ACRN, and a roadmap of the DAI process. What does it look like, who will be involved and responsible for what?
- Have a phase in the process where possible candidates review ACRN website, solo and with ACRN member.

Mentoring and Career Readiness Framework

" 'How is my child going to be able to use this degree? What can we do in the world with this degree?' And so I think maybe that pushes a good idea to send out to departments information about the network."

"We decided that the main source of identity and purpose for the department should be working on a publicly engaged anthropology, and so that has been [...] something that we've been trying to live up to."

Assessments should consider if the department and the university frame their programs in the context of professional and career development. Whether building upon earlier skills sets and knowledge bases are part of curriculum, and if degree programs provide opportunities for bachelor's to master's tracks, or even PhD tracks. What is the mindset that departments bring to building their curriculum?

- Checklist of questions that scope the current status of a department, including recent history, organizational units, relationships between various units, and visioning of the program overall.
- Communications engaging staff to add their thoughts and ideas for career prep that are not currently being serviced by their program.
- Ascertain the commitment to structured workshops and other analyses to guide program reflection and actionable outcomes.

Expectations and Transparency

"And the idea of the level of engagement[...] let's collaborate and think about ways to strengthen and make your department a little more healthy[...] I would ask how long since you've had an annual academic program review? [...] How are your majors? Are they steady, or you are you having drop offs? Are your classes well attended?"

Better engagement with ACRN would come from universities being open about the recent history of their programs, enrollment trends, departments combining or being shrunk down, if collaboration among disciplines is common or uncommon, whether Anthropology programs are undergraduate, graduate, or PhDs.

- During preliminary communications, explain the conditions considered by ACRN for working with DAI. What are things departments are expected to have done, or at least looking to do, prior to working with the DAI?
- Ascertain institutional support, particularly funding or course releases, to facilitate active faculty participation.
- Probing in communications for what the programs expect out of DAI, and what their needs are.

External Facilitation

"[The ACRN] couldn't have been more accommodating and flexible, and it really was sad to me that the faculty wouldn't even let them come."

"There's also this very strong sense that we are not allowed to overlap with other programs in the State of Texas. And so that is also often cited like, Oh, we can't do forensic anthropology, because Texas State does that right?"

Certain departments were far too insular to understand the value of the ACRN, and skeptical of external professional organizations in much the same way they scorned other departments or other universities from offering collaborative opportunities or resources. This speaks to a broader issue of adversarial departmental culture that must be considered when seeking partnerships and drafting communication materials.

- Communications and materials sell the value of cross-disciplinary collaboration, and that suggested strategies are not to override program approach to teaching anthropology, but developing career anthropologists.

VI Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Important But Not Critical Criteria

Strategic Vision and Motivation

- ❑ Department describes an interest in student prospects post-graduation
- ❑ Department has already initiated career readiness or post-graduation supports or services
- ❑ Department describes a sense of urgency in ensuring it can attract students
- ❑ Department can describe its strategic vision

Critical Leadership

- ❑ Key Department faculty support the application
- ❑ Department Chairperson endorses the project and is willing to spend "political capital" to ensure it is successful
- ❑ Department has a DAI Leadership Team who commit to roles and tasks

Connections

- ❑ Department has established relationships with University resource offices or staff
- ❑ Department has positive working relationships with affiliated Departments
- ❑ Department works with or is engaged with for-profit, non-profit, or governmental projects
- ❑ Alumni are active as liaisons to post-University careers or internships

Screening Tool Recommendations

Set up correspondence to happen between student and program

Attitude towards students can be telling of how the department will respond to

In interview ask for definition of applied anthropology

If it unclear, it is highly unlikely the program is prepared for the work it will need to do or the drastic changes that will need to be made

Ask how they feel their program has evolved to its current state, then let them talk

If there is negativity and blame, then the program is not prepared to make real change

Reactions and Questions