Marquette University project, Spring 2026: An Anthropology Program Assessment
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Background: This project was inspired by necessity. Last spring, the one remaining full-time faculty member hired to serve the Anthropology major retired without any replacement. This major is one of 4 programs in a Department of Social and Cultural Sciences. While I hold a joint Ph.D. in Anthropology and Social Work, I was hired to serve the Social Welfare and Justice program rather than Anthropology. The goal of the project was to find a way to help assess the current strengths and needs for sustaining the major - even if no new hires were possible. The program courses are currently taught by 5 part-time faculty and allows up to two elective courses from a choice of four courses that are taught by other programs in the department (including my program in Social Welfare and Justice). Otherwise, all courses taken by Anthropology majors and minors are Anthropology courses. In consultation with the Department Chair, a need was to review the curriculum and consider restructuring. Given my lack of familiarity with the program, especially from a student perspective, my Plan A was to hire 1 or 2 students as assistants in gathering program review data. I also applied for 2 grants to help pay for student assistance. However, those were unsuccessful and yet it was very easy to find excellent students to assist. Therefore, a Plan B was devised with the support of ACRN— a 3 credit course in which students used anthropological research methods to answer the client question of program assessment and recommendations within ongoing budget constraints. This course also helped address a problem, which is that the Anthropology capstone course was merged into the capstone taught by a sociologist for the Sociology major. This semester, graduating seniors were given a choice of either capstone. Thus, the course had two objectives; program assessment & anthropological research methods through a collaborative and professional project. There were 7 students who enrolled; 6 Anthropology majors and a first year student who had taken the introductory anthropology course. This helped the students experience the comparative method— both comparing the assumptions/views of 'insider' Anthropology majors with our 'outside' student and comparing the assumptions/perspectives of their research participants with their knowledge as current students.

As a field project with a goal of a professional presentation, there were three parts:

1. Course introductions and grounding of the project within ethnographic studies of higher education. The helped contextualize their work within academic research and scholarship by providing examples of how academics study their people (so to speak). Students also read and discussed articles I wrote from my projects that detail my research process. ACRN provided a presentation and offers of support.
2. Data collection - through direct assignments and inviting students to identify what felt most drawn to given the overall research question of program assessment. I met with the clients (mostly the Dept. Chair) to help clarify their needs/interests, which brought an emphasis on finding options other than hiring full-time faculty due to resource constraints. I directed students on how to collect data in areas that were not familiar— program assessment from faculty/administration perspectives, and let the students largely direct data collection on what they already knew a lot about from personal experience— student perspectives. The main data collection methods were participant observation (of class sessions, including a museum field trip), interviews (students, faculty and alumni of the Anthropology program as current/former students and current/former faculty), and a survey disseminated through Anthropology courses. Class meetings shifted from a more traditional seminar of readings discussion to "team meetings" to review & discuss data collection progress.
3. Data analysis and preparation. Unfortunately, the data analysis portion was truncated due to time. However, use of Dedoose provided a shared platform to upload data and code interview data. About 2 weeks were focused on the presentation preparation, which I directed at first and then left to the students. The students presented their results and the project showed how actively including students in program assessment can be empowering for students (who are otherwise left out) and informative for faculty and administrators. The Acting Dean invited the students to present for a group of alumni, who were also very receptive.