

MA in Applied Anthropology Proposal Review #2

General

This MA program in Applied Anthropology seems particularly appropriate for IUPUI for the reasons the proposal sets out. It promises to appeal to local students, build upon our mission for community service and involvement, utilize local resources and organizations, and produce students who are equipped to respond to Indianapolis' growing immigrant community as well as its emphasis on the life sciences and its historical institutions. It will continue to distinguish IUPUI as an innovative yet practical urban university.

Requirements and Curriculum

The size and shape of this program makes sense. The admission requirements are very similar to those of the History Department. I imagine the 5-year BA/MA will be popular; my only question there is this: what happens if a senior who has been admitted to the MA program and completes a "more modest" senior capstone project laying groundwork for the MA, then decides not to continue on with the MA? Will their senior capstone experience still be satisfactory for the BA?

The MA course requirements seem appropriate both in terms of their breadth and depth. The two required core courses plus a methods course in their chosen subfield are a good idea; the electives and option to count 6 hours from another department will allow students to follow their interests, support other related MA programs at IUPUI, and give the department some flexibility in staffing courses. The three capstone options allow students to shape degree to their own needs; I would advise the graduate committee to develop a general set of standards for each of the three options to ensure that they are equally rigorous. (What is the difference between a thesis and a publishable research paper? How scholarly does an internship report need to be?) The internship option seems to be the most important way to characterize this degree as "applied." Making it optional puts less stress on the department to start up with a fully established internship program and it gives students more flexibility, but it would seem crucial for a degree in Applied Anthropology. The Public History internship program has proven vital to the strength of our degree, and it has helped most of our students find full time jobs after graduation. I imagine Anthropology will build up the number of internships in their program quickly.

I understand that students will focus on one of three subfields (cultural anthropology, biological anthropology, archaeology). I am less sure how the concentration system works. Will a student need to declare a concentration? Can the department commit to offering courses in all concentrations regularly enough to support them all? I will also be curious to see how the courses with undergraduate and graduate students mixed work out. In my experience it is very difficult to give graduate students a true graduate experience in those courses, and I would recommend that the Anthropology department get adequate support to teach their MA students in graduate-only courses when possible.

Faculty Resources and Implementation

The faculty in the Anthropology Department has a number of significant projects going that will support graduate work in Applied Anthropology well. Enlarging the survey courses and using TAs there will help make room for faculty to teach graduate courses. Although there is a long list of faculty in the proposal, many of them are busy with other administrative responsibilities. Whoever takes on the job as Director of Graduate Studies will likely need a course release. Bringing in members of the Community Advisory Board as adjuncts sounds good for an applied degree, but raises issues about course standards and availability. I encourage the department to develop a framework for such adjunct-taught courses accordingly. While I applaud the willingness of the department to start this up without additional faculty resources and I think they can do it, I hope the quick success of the program allows them to support additional faculty lines.

Conclusion

This MA program sounds appropriate, interesting, and timely.