

External Review Report

7th Cycle Program Review
American Studies Program
School of Humanities and Liberal Studies
San Francisco State University

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1.0 Overview of the Program

This program has done relatively well given the lack of university resources and attention given to it. With just a handful of faculty and now augmented by its first dedicated lecturer, this Program has committed faculty and passionate students. The strengths of the program include the faculty's commitment to interdisciplinary pedagogy and its outward facing orientation.

Its ability to persist despite significant underinvestment is a testament to the passionate commitment of core faculty and student interest in interdisciplinarity as an intellectual approach and cognitive style. The program has done an excellent job hiring dynamic and highly qualified lecturers, both on a full-time and part-time basis. These lecturers are ideal public intellectuals engaged in praxis and outreach in their respective fields.

The Program is at a crossroads now. This review comes at an opportune time for the program to grow its base in order to create a stronger impact at the University within its local and regional contexts.

2.0 Program Quality

We believe that the program quality is generally good, particularly in the areas of interdisciplinary approaches to materials, i.e. cultural texts in their various political and social contexts, in line with American Studies more broadly. We do advise that more focused attention to creative pedagogy be explored, also in line with the field (i.e. as discussed in the June 2017 Teaching and Pedagogy Forum in *American Quarterly*, our flagship journal). While innovative

materials and pedagogy may be a focus of other units on campus (i.e. the Comics Minor), the American Studies practitioners should be on the leading edge as innovators or key partners in these efforts.

Currently, the American Studies Program is driven by people's passionate goodwill and administrative and interpersonal skills, while not adequately supported by formal structures. Lack of formalization makes the program vulnerable. The committed faculty show no signs of burnout, but they may be spreading themselves too thinly.

2.1 Program Planning

We realize that when this Program Review came around, the current leaders in the Program discovered that there was no available program review to build on or respond to, leaving them in an unusual position. However, the self-study did a good job given the lack of available information. We recommend that the question of governance be prioritized. Once it is established, this Program Review should be tied closely with clear leadership stemming from a revitalized governance structure.

We suggest that American Studies consolidate their plan for a separate Curriculum Committee as well as an American Studies Council (p. 9) into a single entity (ie. "Program Committee"). Roles and expectations for the members of this committee should be made clear (we encourage that all faculty participating in this committee either contribute some of their teaching in American Studies, either by cross-listing American Studies -like courses, or in teaching in the

new and expanded curriculum as outlined below, and their contribution to the committee be recognized as university service).

Once the Governance structure is established, the Mission Statement should be revised to better help incoming students understand the new dynamism being offered in American Studies.

Clarifying lecturer review, requesting new classes, establishing the role of affiliated faculty, documenting assessment, and planning future growth all suffer from the lack of structure. That lack of formality is reflected in the absence of student learning outcomes, although the program's reflective teaching community, focus on student learning, and involvement with campus initiatives means that it should be able to comply soon. Other challenges include funding speakers and finding classroom space and spaces for true community-building on three levels: for faculty, for students, and for faculty together with students, engendering a shared sense of cohesive identity that can be noticed and recognized on campus.

2.2 Student Learning and Achievement

The self-study notes the lack of Student Learning Outcomes. The Program needs to articulate the assessment strategies that are already going on informally. Models from other programs can help (American Studies at Cal State Fullerton and San José State University are two directly relevant models). Assessment strategies may include sampling student papers with a rubric to measure achievement of student learning outcomes, surveying alumni more consistently, and collecting assessment memos from the teachers of core courses.

Learning from the experiences of more established American Studies Depts. in the CSU system would ensure that faculty continue to focus their efforts on the individualized advising that benefits students, while satisfying expectations for clear learning outcomes required by the University and WASC. The current tentative PLOs might be revisited for possible modification and a schedule for assessment tied to the cycle of Program Planning later finalized once the self-definitions and shared vision of the Program going forward are more clearly delineated. Here, too, looking to earlier models and dialogue with other Programs both within and beyond the CSU who have found strategies that worked in these areas could be explored. We recommend that the Program look closely at their peers for assessment and curriculum guidance, while recognizing that there may be institutional-specific contexts that need adaptation.

2.3 The Curriculum

At the meeting with American Studies majors and minors, students enthusiastically explained they wanted more classes, even after they had completed the program's requirements. They wished they had known about American Studies earlier in their college career. While both students welcomed the freedom in the major, one did express a desire for more of a core identity in the major, represented by more classes with the AMST designation.

We commend the addition of American Studies major to the Hum Capstone class (p 8). Both AMST students and faculty (through the self-study) identify the need for an introduction, methods and capstone course. We recommend that faculty consider the potential of lower-division introductory classes that would capture the interest of students, in order to find their majors earlier in their career and to offer more General Education classes for the campus.

Whether the GVAR class should be only for American Studies majors, or blended with HUM (as in the San José State American Studies emphasis within Humanities) is also an important discussion to be had (by the revised members involved in governance of the program). There is the possibility that a course be found (or created) to satisfy Special Topics between the methods and the capstone course, and participating members of the revitalized Program Committee could take turns bringing their distinctive strengths in American Studies to that course for the benefit of the students in the growing American Studies community.

We commend the idea of tracks, as a way to find themes in the more individualized pathways. A dynamic Program Committee of interdisciplinary and cutting edge scholars in American Studies and allied interdisciplinary fields (such as Gender Studies) could also contribute different possible track ideas than the ones listed. These might include Borders and Nations, US and the World, Youth and Culture, Empire and War, in line with major trends in the field. Looking at the way elective clusters in the major are flexibly suggested yet open to popular track promotion as it develops at both Cal State Fullerton and San José State might offer some opportunities for reflection on a range of ways to go here, but we do encourage using the tracks to help promote what is distinctive and intellectually engaging about what your city and university have to offer.

Other possible curricular changes, include establishing an internship, moving independent research to an elective course for motivated students, cross listing existing HUM classes (i.e. HUM 225 “Values in American Life,” currently taught as a Popular Culture Class) and identifying unique classes as targeted areas of enrollment growth at both the lower and upper division. If and when freshmen seminars are introduced into First Year Experience at San

Francisco State, getting some noteworthy American Studies courses placed there that will catch and hold student attention might help start to build a broader base of majors in the lower division.

Possible content for high-demand Upper division classes might include Music Cultures, Activists and Intellectuals in America, The American Dream, and Borders In America. American Studies is also a natural home for developing a service learning class and internship opportunities at cultural and community-based institutions. These relationships with institutions is a particular strength of the faculty, as discussed below.

2.4 Faculty

What makes AMS at SFSU distinct? Some of these faculty are clearly well-known public intellectuals with a wide, outward facing orientation. This is a strength to be acknowledged and cultivated.

Topically, the strengths of these particular faculty are in a few distinct areas. These include: Music, culture/ practice thread, Public humanities. The discussion about what classes to offer, in order to fill holes at the University and/or focus on the Program's current strengths, is difficult given the absence of the governance structure. What is clear is that the current faculty are excellent scholars/ teachers/ practitioners.

2.5 Resources

The Bay Area is an excellent place to recruit *additional* lecturers who have received training in American Studies (or related fields, such as Gender and Ethnic Studies) and are cutting edge teachers as well. American Studies is a capacious umbrella. One strand of the field is drawn from people who “do” interdisciplinary and who cross boundaries between campus and community. Another strand is from those who are trained as scholar-practitioners in American Studies and other graduate contexts. These are often overlapping streams, but there are important distinctions as well. Hiring lecturers who have training in the field will supplement the strengths of the existing faculty and program.

2.6 The Program’s Conclusions, Plans, and Goals

The Program Self-Review does a very good job of identifying its goals and plans. It can achieve these with minimal investments in the program, chiefly in the curriculum redesign and in additional courses, which would likely fill because of the topic areas and cognitive approach which is compelling to many students.

3.0 Commendations of Strengths and Achievements

As stated above, the primary strengths of the Program are in the faculty and their commitment to an outward-facing orientation. We commend the personalized attention and high intensity engagement offered by the American Studies faculty at SFSU for getting to know their majors. This personalized approach is a high-impact practice that students appreciate, after graduation. We also recognize and applaud their scholarly and professional accomplishments.

4.0 Recommendations and Strategies for Program Improvement

The Program needs to be more intentional and focused on making strategic partnerships across campus, both in terms of formal academic entities (i.e. partner departments) as well as advising. For example, we were told that Journalism majors are required to have a minor. American Studies would be a logical place for such a partnership, given the particular faculty in the program. In addition, the field of American Studies has focused at length on prisons and criminal justice (i.e. through the Critical Prison Studies Caucus, and embodied by the Past President of the ASA, Ruth Wilson Gilmore). One potential partnership might be with Criminal Justice, and in developing a “Crime and Punishment” track within American Studies. Comic Studies is already extraordinarily popular with students. The expansion of that minor could dovetail with American Studies as well, and ways to connect that minor more directly into this Program should be explored.

In addition, we recommend the following:

- Seek funding for an annual AMST speaker to increase program visibility on campus and take advantage of the program’s strong regional connections and sense of community. A high profile American Studies speaker can help build community across departments at University, including with Ethnic Studies (i.e. our last President of the American Studies was Robert Warrior, one of the Founders of the Indigenous Studies Association. Our next President is Rod Ferguson, who works on race, gender, and sexuality).
- Update the website, including the program mission statement, and publicizing student career options (organize Alumni panels—and then get that positive alumni feedback posted as effective marketing on the web).

- Seek new connections across campus, possibly with the multi-subject credential students, business and marketing students, or international and open university students.
- Explore ways to introduce American Studies to incoming SF State students, possibly by reaching out to high school advisors or community-college advisors. Also, establish closer and direct contact with those advisers guiding students through their roadmap encounters as they just begin at San Francisco State and are not even aware of all the possibilities that exist for them.
- Invite student interns to market the department through outreach and/or peer advising, promoting the program's identity across campus or to alumni. (With a bit of planning and some reflexive analysis, this could also be combined with an independent study within the major.)

Resources

One of our main recommendations is to hire additional full-time lecturers for new classes and more sections of existing classes. American Studies classes WILL fill because of the nature of the field, but hiring in key topic areas as well as exciting scholar/practitioners to augment the current excellent faculty would yield fully enrolled classes, as well a “buzz” for a revitalized program with a sense of purpose and contribution.

Many of these opportunities require relatively little university investment. Given its track record of relative success with very little resources, this program deserves the chance to grow strategically.

Conclusion

This program has performed well for its students and for the university. With additional support from the administration, as well as a more formal structure, the program has the potential to develop into an even more important locus of interdisciplinary research, community partnership, and student success.

The California State University system is such a significant conduit for a vital and important component of California's population. For many, including first generation students in higher education in the city and the region this campus serves, American Studies as a discipline has so much to offer to make one both a lifelong learner and an informed, participating citizen, even while teaching the cognitive, communication, and connecting skills necessary to succeed professionally in the 21st century. We come away from your campus convinced that American Studies at San Francisco State has untapped potential that, once realized, will rebound to the greater good of the students, the university, the city, and the state.