

**Response to External Reviewers' Report
American Studies
January 2018**

1.0 Overview of the Program

We appreciate the review's comments about our program's resilience and commitment to interdisciplinarity. The former is especially important because the program has virtually no dedicated resources, and its success has always depended on supportive faculty from various departments and colleges. That fact, in turn, makes interdisciplinarity all the more important. The willingness to cross disciplinary boundaries has been a hallmark of American Studies since its inception. We are therefore gratified that the review calls out that aspect of the program for praise.

We also appreciate the review's recognition of our "dynamic and highly qualified lecturers." To be cast as "ideal public intellectuals" does no harm to our morale or sense of purpose. Nevertheless, we know there is much work to do. We agree that the program is at a crossroads and poised to "create a stronger impact." We are committed to achieving that goal by implementing the review's key recommendations, raising the program's profile, recruiting new faculty, encouraging them to identify with the program and its goals, increasing the number of majors and minors, and serving those students more effectively.

2.0 Program Quality

We agree that creative pedagogy should be a high priority for the program, and that American Studies faculty should be on the leading edge of such innovations. Toward this end, we will address longstanding pedagogical challenges--including, for example, fashioning courses that serve GE students as well as American Studies majors--as well as a host of newer challenges related to hybrid and online course offerings. We share the general view that such offerings are especially practical for motivated upper-division students working in their own field.

2.1 Program Planning

We appreciate the review's emphasis on a suitable governance structure, and its call for a Program Committee is well taken. We also agree that Program Committee members should receive formal recognition for that service. With a stronger governance structure, we will be better positioned to clarify lecturer

review, request new classes, establish the roles of affiliated faculty, document assessment, and plan for future growth.

The first step toward a practical governance structure, we think, is more (and more frequent) communication among sympathetic faculty. We believe that such communication will be more productive if it includes a clear sense of direction and purpose at the outset. As per the review, we will ask faculty to teach or consider cross-listing courses that support the American Studies program and its students.

Following the review's recommendations, we will revise the Mission Statement to help incoming students understand the field and its unique intellectual contributions.

We agree further that hosting guest speakers would raise the program's profile and increase cohesion among our majors. That cohesion is weakened by the fact that most American Studies courses are populated overwhelmingly by GE students. We are intrigued by the prospect of identifying or creating suitable spaces for community-building among the program's faculty and/or students.

2.2 Student Learning and Achievement

The review correctly notes that we can learn a great deal about student learning objectives and assessment from similar CSU programs. We will generate SLOs and are grateful for the review's pointer to relevant models. We are similarly grateful for its assessment suggestions--for example, sampling student papers with a rubric, surveying alumni more consistently, and collecting assessment memos from those who teach the core courses.

2.3 The Curriculum

The reviewers' onsite conversations with two American Studies students pointed to curricular improvements, some of which were already under consideration. Although students enjoy significant freedom to fashion their own majors, one expressed a desire for more cohesion, including more classes with the AMST designation. We plan to implement this suggestion in short order.

Another suggestion was that students should become aware of the program earlier in their undergraduate experience. As it stands now, we rarely reach students before they encounter our upper-division GE courses, and most undergraduates have chosen their majors and minors by that point. This is another important suggestion, and we are eager to create or refashion lower-division offerings to implement it.

As the review notes, our students and faculty self-study identified the need for an introductory, methods, and capstone course. This effort will be the starting point for our curricular changes. We believe these changes will foster a stronger core identity for the program and its majors.

The review mentions our new GWAR course for American Studies. We adapted a course that was already on the books (AMST 300) to better serve our majors, who previously took other GWAR courses to satisfy this requirement. For various practical reasons, we will probably encourage Humanities majors to enroll in this course as well. In this first iteration, we will discuss the field of American Studies more generally and focus heavily on crafting carefully written, evidence-based arguments.

We are receptive to the idea of a Special Topics course to be taken between the methods and capstone courses. Ideally, members of the Program Committee would, as the review suggests, “take turns bringing their distinctive strengths in American Studies to that course for the benefit of the students in the growing American Studies community.”

A longer-term goal might be the idea of tracks as outlined in the review. By way of example, it mentions the following tracks: Borders and Nations, US and the World, Youth and Culture, and Empire and War. This idea is also well taken and could be discussed more thoroughly by the Program Committee. Once again, we appreciate the pointers to other CSU models.

Other specific recommendations— creating internships and service learning opportunities, cross-listing Humanities courses with American Studies, refashioning HUM 225 (“Values in American Life”), offering first-year seminars, etc.—are also promising and will be taken up by the Program Committee.

2.4 Faculty

The review poses a key question: What makes our program unique, not only on campus, but also compared to other American Studies programs? Its answer is that we boast “well-known public intellectuals with a wide, outward facing orientation.” It adds that this asset is “a strength to be acknowledged and cultivated.”

By way of cultivation, there is much work to do. The SFSU faculty is extraordinarily rich, and the American Studies program can do much more to tap its expertise. If our comparative advantage lies in our wide, outward-facing orientation, the Program Committee can and should consider new and creative

ways to build on this strength. A speaker series is an obvious place to start, but fresh possibilities will almost certainly arise from regular meetings and informal exchanges. This should be a high priority for the revitalized Program Committee.

2.5. Resources

The review notes that the Bay Area is an excellent place to recruit additional lecturers with expertise in American Studies. It should be noted, however, that the program is directed and coordinated out of the School of Humanities and Liberal Studies; as a result, our hiring needs are shaped—and occasionally overshadowed—by those larger programs.

As the review notes, “The committed faculty show no signs of burnout, but they may be spreading themselves too thinly.” We concur. Although we have done much with little, it will be difficult to realize the program’s full potential without a firm institutional commitment to that effort and the additional resources to support it.

2.6 The Program’s Conclusions, Plans, and Goals

We appreciate the review’s endorsement of our Program Review Self-Study’s conclusions regarding our goals and plans. We agree that the program 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

We are gratified that the review acknowledges our faculty’s commitment, outward-facing orientation, and scholarly and professional accomplishments. We especially appreciate its praise for our personalized attention to, and high-intensity engagement with, our students.

4.0 Recommendations and Strategies for Program Improvement

We agree that the program needs to forge strategic partnerships across campus. We will contact other academic units to create those partnerships. We will also create and update the website, which will include the mission statement.

Once established, the Program Committee will consider the review’s other key recommendations:

- Seek funding for an annual AMST speaker to increase program visibility on campus

- Publicize student career options by organizing alumni panels
- Explore ways to introduce American Studies to incoming SF State students
- Invite student interns to market the department through outreach and/or peer advising.

Resources

We second the review's recommendations to hire additional full-time lecturers for new classes and more sections of existing classes. We would add, however, that the resource pinch is felt most keenly at the administrative level.

Conclusion

We appreciate the review's conclusion that "the program has performed well for its students and for the university." We also agree that "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." Finally, we endorse the review's conclusion 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."