

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program Name (no acronyms): American Studies

Department: American Studies

Degree or Certificate Level: MA

College/School: College of Arts and Sciences

Date (Month/Year): September 2023

Assessment Contact: Heidi Ardizzone, Chair

In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 2023

In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? 2022

Is this program accredited by an external program/disciplinary/specialized accrediting organization? No

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle? (Please list the full, complete learning outcome statements and not just numbers, e.g., Outcomes 1 and 2.)

SLO1: Students will explain the contexts—such as historical, political, geographic, literary, artistic, social, or intellectual—that shape American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas.

We revised all SLOs and assessment our plan in Summer 2022 in response to the feedback we received in Spring 2022. We essentially trialed the plan by completing our entire rubric in 2022. Now, in 2023, we are beginning our assessment cycle by assessing SLO1, above.

2. Assessment Methods: Artifacts of Student Learning

Which artifacts of student learning were used to determine if students achieved the outcome(s)? Please describe the artifacts in detail and identify the course(s) in which they were collected. Clarify if any such courses were offered a) online, b) at the Madrid campus, or c) at any other off-campus location.

The direct measure artifact of student learning used to determine if students have achieved this outcome is the MA project, which is described here:

The American Studies MA culminates in a major written project, either a *portfolio paper* or a *thesis*. A *portfolio paper* is a research article, 20-30 pages in length, that makes an original argument based in primary and secondary evidence and demonstrates the student's knowledge of their field. It is typically a revised and expanded seminar paper. A *thesis* is a more extensive project, typically 60-80 pages in length, that makes an original argument based in primary and secondary research and demonstrates the student's knowledge of their field.

The indirect measure artifact of student learning used to determine if students have achieved this outcome is a student survey. It is also attached here.

The MA direct assessment artifacts were collected either through ASTD 5990 (for the thesis) or at the deadlines for the MA portfolio paper by students' primary advisors. Students' entire committees submitted the assessment rubrics at the time of the students' oral exams.

The indirect measure was collected electronically by the graduate coordinator.

ASTD 5990 and the portfolio paper process are offered in-person on the St. Louis campus only.

3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process

What process was used to evaluate the artifacts of student learning, and by whom? Please identify the tools(s) (e.g., a rubric) used in the process and **include them in/with this report document** (please do not just refer to the assessment plan).

The SLO was evaluated by rating the artifact of student learning with a rubric (attached) as a direct measure by students' entire committees. All SLOs were also evaluated through an indirect measure, a student survey (also attached).

We discussed these findings at our department meeting in Fall 2023. We took careful notes that iterated the above, and tried to deduce why the ratings for the artifacts were what they were, while also discussing the limitations of the assessment this year (the small sample size, etc.).

4. Data/Results

What were the results of the assessment of the learning outcome(s)? Please be specific. Does achievement differ by teaching modality (e.g., online vs. face-to-face) or on-ground location (e.g., STL campus, Madrid campus, other off-campus site)?

We had four students complete MA projects in Spring 2023. The data below, as a result, is likely to be unreliable due to the small sample size. As we accrue MA projects over a longer assessment cycle, we'll be able to gather more meaningful data.

SLO1: One student's work rated a 3 (Exemplary) by every member of the three-person committee. Another student's work rated an average of 2.5 (between Exemplary and Competent) by the three-person committee. One student received an average of 1.75 (between Competent and Developing) by two members of the three-person committee; the third member did not submit the assessment rubric. One student rated a 2 by one member of the three-person committee; the two other members did not submit the assessment rubric.

Unfortunately, only three of four students submitted the student survey. Of them, two rated their own mastery of SLO1 a three, and one was a one.

We only offer this course/experience in person on the St. Louis campus, so there are no differences in modality or location.

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

What have you learned from these results? What does the data tell you?

It probably goes without saying that with such a small sample size, this data is not terribly meaningful. It is also difficult to know whether some of the student's work—such as the one whose work rated a 1.75 average—is an outlier, since one of the committee members did not submit the assessment rubric. In the section on “closing the loop,” we will address streamlining our assessment process to receive equitable data for each student.

It seems like most of our MA students are contextualizing their work (SLO1) reasonably—all but one was deemed “competent” or greater on SLO1.

Here, it might be worth noting that all these students submitted a portfolio paper rather than a thesis. A portfolio paper is shorter and the project requires less intensive research, but because it is not credit-bearing and is, instead, done on top of routine coursework, perhaps students are not able to devote as much time to the projects—this may especially be the case for students who, for example, are working full-time jobs and completing their MAs part time (as was the case with the lowest-rated artifact). This is something to consider as we look to “close the loop,” or at least to study in future years when we have larger numbers of artifacts from which to collect data.

6. Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of Current Assessment Findings

A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of

assessment?

We discussed these findings at a department meeting in Fall 2023. We took careful notes that iterated the above, and tried to deduce why the ratings for the artifacts were what they were, while also discussing the limitations of the assessment this year (the small sample size, etc.) We agreed that a simplified assessment plan based on work produced at the end of a student's degree program would yield the best data, and that assessing one outcome per year would assist us with compiling a larger pool of student work that would provide a more meaningful glimpse into our curricular successes and areas for improvement.

B. How specifically have you decided to use these findings to improve teaching and learning in your program? For example, perhaps you've initiated one or more of the following:

Changes to the Curriculum or Pedagogies

- Course content
- Teaching techniques
- Improvements in technology
- Prerequisites
- Course sequence
- New courses
- Deletion of courses
- Changes in frequency or scheduling of course offerings

Changes to the Assessment Plan

- Student learning outcomes
- Artifacts of student learning
- Evaluation process
- Evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics)
- Data collection methods
- Frequency of data collection

Please describe the actions you are taking as a result of these findings.

While we aren't sure if the data we were able to collect in 2023 is terribly meaningful on account of the small sample size and possibly idiosyncrasies with individual students, we have noticed places where our assessment plan—particularly our data collection methods—could be improved.

For these MA projects, we encountered issues with data collection. Some faculty members did not submit the rubrics for the committees they served on. Additionally, only 50% of the students completed the exit survey. In both cases, this was after repeated reminders from the graduate coordinator and department chair.

In the future, it might make the most sense to streamline this process by collecting rubrics only from the students' primary advisor. This has the added benefit of ensuring the faculty members completing the rubrics are housed in ASTD and are familiar with the field and assessment processes (right now, students may have a committee member from outside of ASTD on their committees, although they may not be their chair, and it makes less sense to have these outside committee members complete the rubrics).

If student compliance with the exit survey remains an issue, the exit survey may be abandoned. While some useful feedback about the program is gleaned from the survey, particularly in the comments section, this is ultimately only an indirect measure of student learning and can only be used to corroborate the findings of direct measures.

Finally, we might consider a revision to the artifact description in the graduate handbook, which would more clearly articulate the learning outcomes for the MA to students. To do this would mean that MA advisors can communicate even clearer senses of the outcomes for the project to their students and attend to them in their mentoring role.

In short, in AY23-24 we first anticipate changes to the assessment plan in terms of revising our data collection practices, and from there we might modify our approaches to student mentoring and perhaps graduate handbook content in its overall description of the MA project.

While the small sample size we assessed with our new rubric this year discourages us from making many curricular or policy changes at this point, we might keep an eye out in future assessment on two things: First, whether students who are choosing to complete their MA with a portfolio paper are writing enough research papers in their first year to begin that revision process early enough that they have adequate time to polish their written work. Second, we may consider whether portfolio paper students are getting enough feedback from their entire committees or relying

very heavily on their primary advisors. We might consider how they can get adequate feedback from a range of readers without overstressing faculty workload.

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

N/A

7. Closing the Loop: Review of Previous Assessment Findings and Changes

A. What is at least one change your program has implemented in recent years as a result of assessment data?

We revised our entire assessment plan for the MA (and BA and PhD) in Summer 2022 in response to the feedback we received in Spring 2022. This is not a curricular change, but it seemed most urgent to have a workable assessment plan so that we could collect meaningful data to enact any future changes in our curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices.

In response to our assessment process in 2021, on which we received feedback in Spring 2022, the entire faculty discussed the need to streamline our assessment plan. As our assessment report feedback from AY20-21 indicated, we had areas of our plan that could be improved. We determined to rewrite our assessment plans to submit in Fall 2022. This work was completed over Summer 2022. In early Fall 2022 the entire faculty met to discuss the plans before they were submitted to the College of Arts and Sciences and the Provost's Office. What follows is a summary of the feedback we received and our efforts to offer corrective action in this plan:

The outcome we assessed in 2021 required students to apply their academic knowledge in broader contexts than academia. This outcome and its curriculum map, the committee pointed out, had two problems. First, the outcome was a vague charge. Second, there wasn't a required place in the curriculum where this could be measured. MA students had an option to take an internship, where this outcome could be measured, but it wasn't a requirement for the degree, which meant it could never be assessed for all students. As a result, the faculty needed to decide whether this was, indeed, an outcome all MA students should achieve (which would mean that the internship should become a requirement for every student), or whether this was *not* a necessary outcome for a MA in American Studies. We determined that while the internship is incredibly useful for students who want to enter museum studies, nonprofit organizing, or other fields, for students who plan to move ahead to the PhD—which is most of our MA students—this was not a necessary outcome. As a result, we rewrote our learning outcomes for the MA to emphasize disciplinary achievements and habits of mind and retained the internship as an option for the degree, but not a requirement.

The assessment report we received in Spring 2022 also commented on the small number of students completing the MA, and how that meant we weren't able to produce meaningful data. Due to student funding constraints, the size of our MA program is unlikely to change, and we will likely continue with only 2-4 students per year who complete the degree. Instead, to create a meaningful data set, we must accumulate artifacts over a period of years. As a result, when we revised this assessment plan, we extended the length of our assessment cycle to enable the accumulation of more artifacts.

This revision to our assessment plan also has additional advantages that were not highlighted by the feedback we received on our 2021 report. It ensures that we will also be focusing on the most advanced work produced by our students when we only use the culminating MA project, whether portfolio paper or thesis, as an artifact for direct measure. Although our MA students have a portfolio paper or thesis option, the major difference between these artifacts is length—both are pieces of original scholarship that will be able to be measured successfully, we believe, using the same rubric. We believe that this is a step forward for more effective assessment of our MA program as a whole.

Finally, this revision to our assessment plan also solves a problem that faculty members were concerned with—how complex and time-consuming the data collection and assessment process was. By streamlining the

assessment process, we will ensure more accurate record-keeping and increase faculty involvement in the process.

Taken together, we hope this revision to our MA assessment plan will result in improvements in our students' experience and aid us in delivering the best possible graduate education in American Studies.

Going forward, we need to think more about how similar outcomes differ at the BA, MA, and PhD level. American Studies is unusual in that students, even those entering the PhD program, typically do not have background in the field, and therefore there is more overlap in SLOs for the different-level programs than may be typical, as we discussed with SLU's Assessment Coordinator, Marissa Cope, after receiving feedback on our 2022 assessment.

The faculty wonder if it makes sense to expect not different outcomes, fundamentally, but higher scores and a greater number of students achieving them at different levels—this should be tackled for American Studies overall for the 2024 assessment cycle.

B. How has this change/have these changes been assessed?

Implementing the new plan in a preliminary manner in 2022 allowed us a trial to see if we believe our new assessment plan will be workable. This was discussed at a faculty meeting, with careful minutes taken to be assessed. It will take time and an accumulation of artifacts to truly assess whether these changes have worked.

C. What were the findings of the assessment?

Certainly, having one artifact to assess, which truly epitomizes the culmination of the MA degree, is an improvement in the quality of our assessment protocol and the quality of the measures. The simplified outcomes are also a step in the right direction. At this point the small artifact sample size remains an issue, but the sample size will increase with time. The process is greatly streamlined and as a result we feel like overall involvement in the assessment process will be improved.

D. How do you plan to (continue to) use this information moving forward?

Moving forward, it makes sense to continue to think about how to translate the complexity of an interdisciplinary field to simple, measurable outcomes, and implementing simple, measurable processes for all our degree programs. "Interdisciplinarity" is often a buzzword in higher education, but few people successfully describe, implement, and measure it. This is the challenge of assessment in American Studies, and it makes good sense to continue to consider how our instruments, our curriculum, and our pedagogical practices are meeting this challenge.

IMPORTANT: Please submit any assessment tools (e.g., artifact prompts, rubrics) with this report as separate attachments or copied and pasted into this Word document. Please do not just refer to the assessment plan; the report should serve as a stand-alone document.

Student Name:

Rater Name:

Rating Date:

American Studies MA Assessment Rubric

Artifact Description: The American Studies MA culminates in a major written project, either a *portfolio paper* or a *thesis*. A *portfolio paper* is a research article, 20-30 pages in length, that makes an original argument based in primary and secondary evidence and demonstrates the student’s knowledge of their field. It is typically a revised and expanded seminar paper. A *thesis* is a more extensive project, typically 60-80 pages in length, that makes an original argument based in primary and secondary research and demonstrates the student’s knowledge of their field.

Learning Outcome	Exemplary (3)	Competent (2)	Developing (1)	Insufficient (0)	Rating
SLO1: Students will explain the contexts—such as historical, political, geographic, literary, artistic, social, or intellectual—that shape American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas.	The sources or ideas addressed by the student are thoroughly and appropriately contextualized and the student cogently explains why these contexts matter to the overall argument.	The sources or ideas addressed by the student are contextualized, but the student does not make the connection between why these contexts matter to the overall argument.	The student attempts to contextualize the sources or ideas addressed in the thesis, but these contexts are inadequately researched and why they matter to the overall argument remains opaque.	The student does not endeavor to contextualize the sources or ideas in the thesis.	
SLO2: Students will assess how American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas shape or are shaped by axes of power,	The student provides a thorough, appropriate assessment of how American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas	The student thoroughly assesses how American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas shape or are shaped by axes of power,	The student mentions how American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas shape or are shaped by axes of power, such as race, gender,	The student does not attend to how American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas shape or are shaped by axes of	

such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, or ability.	shape or are shaped by axes of power, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, or ability—including nuanced attention to how two or more of these frameworks are interlocking.	such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, or ability, but the assessment is limited to sufficient attention to one of these frameworks.	sexuality, class, nation, or ability, but how this occurs is not thoroughly addressed.	power, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, or ability.	
SLO3: Students will synthesize two or more disciplinary approaches in analyses of American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas.	The student thoroughly integrates two or more disciplinary approaches to analyze of American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas.	The student uses the approaches of two or more disciplines to analyze American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas, but these approaches are not integrated.	The student competently uses a single disciplinary approach to analyze American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas.	The student's analysis is not transparently derived from disciplinary knowledge.	
SLO4: Students will effectively articulate arguments and information for an American Studies audience.	The student has a clearly stated argument that proceeds logically with strong transitions. The argument is sufficiently supported by primary and secondary source evidence and the stakes of the argument are clear. The language, style,	The student has an argument and a logical organizational structure, but there may be points where transitions could be more effective. The argument is sufficiently supported by primary and secondary source evidence, but the stakes of the argument might not	The student's argument is less clear than it could be, and the organization of the paper could be improved. There are places where the evidence that is meant to support the argument is described rather than interpreted. There are rare places where the language, style,	The student does not have an argument. The essay is disorganized. The evidence presented does not support the argument. The essay's language, style, genre, and tone is inappropriate for an academic	

	genre, and tone are appropriate for American Studies audiences. There are no problems with spelling, punctuation, grammar, or syntax. All sources are properly documented.	be transparent. The language, style, genre, and tone are appropriate for academic audiences, but perhaps not for American Studies in particular. There are rare errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, or syntax. All sources are documented, but the documentation may have subtle formatting errors.	genre, and tone may not be appropriate for academic audiences. There are errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and syntax that may occasionally impede reading. Most sources are cited but there may be some information missing in the documentation.	audience. There are frequent errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and syntax that make portions of the student's work unintelligible. The sources are not cited.	
SLO5: Students will identify how their research extends, diverges from, or speaks to prior American Studies scholarship.	The student commandingly engages with scholarship in their American Studies subfield, and convincingly positions their own work in relation to what has come before in a generative manner.	The student engages dutifully with scholarship in their American Studies subfield and demonstrates how their work relates to it.	The student draws on scholarship in their American Studies subfield, but what their own work contributes to the scholarly conversation in American Studies is unclear or somewhat unconvincing.	The student does not endeavor to position their work in relation to American Studies scholarship.	

Student Name:

Survey Date:

American Studies MA Exit Survey

Artifact Description: This survey is provided to students graduating with an American Studies MA in order to gather information about the American Studies MA curriculum, course offerings, and pedagogy. Student feedback delivered here will help us to consistently revise our practices to deliver the best possible graduate education in American Studies.

1) How well did you achieve each of the following student learning outcomes?

SLO1: Students will explain the contexts—such as historical, political, geographic, literary, artistic, social, or intellectual—that shape American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas.

Extremely Well (3)	Very Well (2)	Adequately (1)	Insufficiently (0)
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SLO2: Students will assess how American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas shape or are shaped by axes of power, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, or ability.

Extremely Well (3)	Very Well (2)	Adequately (1)	Insufficiently (0)
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SLO3: Students will synthesize two or more disciplinary approaches in analyses of American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas.

Extremely Well (3)	Very Well (2)	Adequately (1)	Insufficiently (0)
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SLO4: Students will effectively articulate arguments and information for an American Studies audience.

Extremely Well (3)	Very Well (2)	Adequately (1)	Insufficiently (0)
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SLO5: Students will identify how their research extends, diverges from, or speaks to prior American Studies scholarship.

Extremely Well (3)	Very Well (2)	Adequately (1)	Insufficiently (0)
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2) What aspects of your MA education in American Studies helped you with your learning, and why were they helpful?

3) What might American Studies do differently in its MA program to help you learn more effectively, and why would these actions help?