

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program:	Department: American Studies
Degree or Certificate Level: MA	College/School: CAS
Date (Month/Year): 12/2020	Primary Assessment Contact: Heidi Ardizzone
In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 2018-2020	
In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? 2020	

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

LO 1: "Apply the major practices, theories, or research methodologies in American Studies"

2. Assessment Methods: Artifacts of Student Learning

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

This assessment focused on the first year of students' coursework, assessing their **knowledge** of the "major practices, theories, or research methodologies in American Studies."

LO 1 is the same for MA and PhD programs; about 2/3 of our MA students are already accepted into our MA-to-PhD program. Assessing LO 1 at the first year level uses a shared artifact of the first year qualifying exam. The next time we assess LO 1 (2023), we will look separately at MA portfolio papers and/or dissertations.

The qualifying exam is connected to ASTD 5000 but is taken later in the year and also covers other coursework. Only the essay based on the required 5000 course is assessed. There is generally no online or Madrid or other off campus component, but in Spring 2020 the qualifying exam was given virtually and students submitted their work via email or Zoom.

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.

#1 The department chair used the attached rubric to assess qualifying exam questions based on our ASTD 5000 course (Perspectives in American Studies, required of all first- semester students) from the last three years. We had one rubric sheet for each of twelve student essays from the last three years (2018-2020) of exams. In the future we will also have the 5000 faculty, who grades the exam, fill out a rubric sheet so we have multiple evaluations of each essay. The grades provided could have been used as well but as there was no central rubric attached to those grades we decided they would not be useful. (For the purposes of grading students, exams are given a high pass, low pass, or fail. Only in the case of a failure are details requested and another faculty member asked to evaluate.)

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)?

#1 Overall, of the five rubric questions, the first three most directly address LO 1:

- A. Explain what American Studies is as a field (avg: 3)
- B. Define and explain interdisciplinary approaches in American Studies (avg 2)
- C. Identify thematic and theoretical threads within American Studies (avg 4)

Essentially these questions represent three different ways that students might show their knowledge of major practices, theories, or research methodologies. For the purposes of grading the students, a solid answer of just one of these three suffices. However, the distinctions offer some insights into how students are able to define American Studies in their first year. (We should note that few students come into our graduate programs with any background in American Studies, hence our prioritization of making sure their early coursework fills in this knowledge gap.) Clearly students were most comfortable identifying the field by its subject content, and least likely to talk about methodology (interdisciplinarity) in their essays. (Answers that fit A but not B or C included a historical approach to defining the field or a focus on key analytics.)

The remaining two questions also have some bearing on LO 1

- D. Appropriate use of assigned texts to give examples. 4.33
- E. Understanding and memory of major assigned texts. 4.33

Students did much better on these two points. In part this is because the prompts (which shift from year to year) usually emphasized thematic threads and analysis over field definitions.

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

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

#1 There is a clear disparity between students' generally Good-Excellent ability to talk about texts and the thematic threads within American Studies as opposed to their Acceptable or Poor ability to directly define the field and especially to do so in relation to interdisciplinarity of the field. This has been a concern for us but data from later assessments (see below) suggest that it is a learning curve issue for students.

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 have not yet been able to discuss these results as a full faculty. I plan to do so in February and anticipate the following:

#1: We have had numerous conversations in the recent past about the exam questions, the purpose of the exam, and the links (or lack thereof) between our LOs and the exam prompts. The exams are graded at the time they are taken, and students must receive a passing grade in order for them to continue in good standing in the program. So we are very aware of the strengths and weakness student responses seem to suggest in specific years. We also know that in the past, our approach to the exam questions has been too broad and of course not at all focused on a set of learning objectives we hadn't yet revised. For example while we had retained exam essays from 2016 and 2017 when the course was taught by a now-retired faculty member. We decided not to include those because his prompts were not to write an essay at all but a series of short answers to "identify and state the significance of" prompts to a list of authors rather than an essay. These

paragraphs would not be usefully assessable with our current rubric as there was no space for a student to address a “total field” question at all. In a sense, then, the essay prompts have developed towards their current reflection of LO 3 already, even though we had not previously done a formal assessment of them.

Similarly, we may want to make some changes to how the exams are graded. Right now for the purposes of grading students, exams are given a high pass, low pass, or fail. Only in the case of a failure are details requested and another faculty member asked to evaluate it. This meant that for this round of assessment we did not have multiple or at-the-time evaluations of the essays. We considered using the grades we had for previous years, but as there was no central rubric or explanation attached to those grades we decided they would not be useful. Going forward, I will be proposing that faculty grading the exam also complete a rubric and that some process for gathering additional evaluations either at the time (as we do routinely with other artifacts) or later for the assessment (as I did this year). This will both bring the student-facing purpose of the exams into clearer alignment with our learning objectives and assessment, and provide a more robust basis for analysis than this year’s offering.

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.

None yet

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

Because of the delay in completing this assessment (due to Covid pressures and a severe shortage of faculty time and energy) we have not yet been able to have a full faculty discussion.

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 previously assessed MA portfolio papers for LO 3. In the process of discussing both our rubric, LOs and the results of the assessment we decided to create a clearer rubric for students from both the current description on our Graduate Handbook and our materials developed in this process. The purpose of this is to make the rubric for evaluation of individual portfolio papers as clear to students as the rubric for assessing our program through the collective portfolio papers has become for us. In other words, we have refined our student-facing materials regarding this program requirement to better reflect its connection to our department’s learning objectives for MA and PhD students.

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

This change only took place in 2019, so we have not re-assessed either LO 3 or the portfolio papers yet. We are scheduled to do so again in 2022.

C. What were the findings of the assessment?

n/a

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

n/a

IMPORTANT: Please submit any assessment tools and/or revised/updated assessment plans along with this report.