

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program:	Department: American Studies
Degree or Certificate Level: PhD	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" (1st-year exam and 3-4th year Prospectus)

LO 2: "Apply the knowledge from the field(s) of study to address problems in broader contexts" (3-4th year Prospectus)

LO 3: Articulate arguments or explanations to a disciplinary or professional audience in oral and written forms. (3-4th year Dissertation Prospectus)

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.

We did several assessments in our PhD program to address previous feedback that our PhD assessment needed to be more rigorous.

#1: is linked to the MA one as we used a shared required artifact of 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.

#2 We also separately collectively assessed and analyzed the rubrics for all Written and Oral Dissertation Prospectuses presented by PhD Candidates between Fall 2018 and Spring 2020. Our rubrics include questions that speak to three of our four LOs (1, 2, and 3). While normally we would only focus on one or two of these, we have included analysis of all three below to catch ourselves up and create a stronger baseline for future years' analyses.

There is generally no online or Madrid or other off campus component, but in Spring 2020 the prospectus defenses were held virtually.

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.)

#2 The department chair used the attached rubric to quantify data collected by dissertation committee members at or near the time the students' written submission and oral presentation. Using an Excel spreadsheet we found averages for each question and then combined questions addressing each LO assessed for a combined average. We 22 rubric sheets for oral and 23 for written (there should have been 24 as we gather data from three faculty for each student and there were eight students represented, so one or two sheets were missing from each set.

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.

#2 LO 1 Not surprisingly, students did much better on parallel questions in their prospectus defenses (usually timed in their third or at the beginning of their fourth year) than then did in their first-year exams.

The LO 1 average for oral presentation was 3.9 and for written prospectus was 4.1. The combined average at the exam level was 3.0. (See above for breakdown of this number.) This is a significant increase over the course of the roughly 4-5 semesters between these snapshots of student work from an average of “Good” and an average of “Acceptable.” Moreover, the earlier evaluation stresses only **knowledge** of the major practices, theories, or research methodologies, while the later one looks for **application** of the knowledge to their project, as well as an articulation of the connection between their project and the field of American Studies.

The LO 2 average for written prospectus was 4.0 and for oral presentation was 3.90.

The LO 3 averages were slightly higher: 4.25 for oral and 4.15 for written.

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.

#2 LO 1 Most students have completed a bit more than half of their required topics coursework by then end of the first year, so in the intervening time they have additional coursework, independent and one-on-one mentoring for their PhD literature reviews, and preparation for the prospectus itself. These results also suggest that our concerns about overall student performance in the first-year essays may not be so warranted, but we will need to keep gathering data to see if that optimism bears out.

#2 LO 2 This is the first time we’ve assessed LO 2 for any of our graduate programs and we’ve discussed some concerns with its intention and focus specifically around the phrase “broader contexts.” The fact that I’m having difficulty finding an interpretation other than “our students did well,” suggests that we need to have a broader question about this particular LO. Even if we keep it as is, this data will primarily serve a baseline or point of comparison for later assessments.

#3 LO 3 This was one of the strongest outcomes we’ve seen in our four years of assessment. We learned that we can focus our attentions elsewhere; this LO is fine for PhD students as they begin their dissertation work.

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 any of 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.

#2: As mentioned above I plan to raise the question of the wording and intention of LO 2, particularly to distinguish it further from LO 1. We will be evaluating that Learning Objective in 2021.

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.

1 None yet.

#2 See below

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. I plan to do so in February.

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?

(related to #2) We added rubrics for our Dissertation Prospectuses and are currently in the process of updating the Prospectus Guidelines. Originally, these were created by the University and were aimed at multi-disciplinary collection of science, social science, and humanities programs.

We also adjusted our assessment plan to focus on Learning Objectives instead of on artifacts as the organizing principle in response to feedback on our previous submission. The rotation is complicated due to needing to synch some of the assessments with our embedded MA program, but we’ve mapped out the next 10 years with every LO getting assessed every 3-4 years

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

This change only took place in 2018, just after our assessment of portfolio papers began. Although this was a different assessment, it led to us proactively making adjustments to our planned approach to dissertations and dissertation prospectus requirements rather than waiting for the assessment cycle to come around.

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.

American Studies
 Prospectus Presentation Rubric
 Assessment Use Only
 Submit to American Studies Graduate Coordinator

Student _____

Date _____

Learning Objectives:

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

LO 2: Apply knowledge from the field(s) of study to address problems in broader contexts.

LO 3: Articulate arguments or explanations to a disciplinary or professional audience in oral form.

Oral Assessment Instructions

1. Listen to the presentation, questions and student's answers
2. Fill out the table below using the following rubric and scale

Scale: 5= Excellent; 4= Good; 3= Acceptable; 2= Poor; 1= Unacceptable.

Identifies a problem in the field(s) of study	
Conveys the potential significance or intervention of the dissertation project in a broader context	
Describes how major practices, theories, or research methodologies in American Studies may relate to the dissertation project.	
Proposes a creative and realistic research plan for accomplishing and organizing the project	
Expresses ideas orally in a well-organized and clear manner	
Composes convincing and coherent answers to questions	
Oral presentation is well organized and coherent	

Total Score: _____

Reviewer's Initials: _____

American Studies
 Written Prospectus Rubric
 Assessment Use Only
 Submit to American Studies Graduate Coordinator

Student _____

Date _____

Learning Objectives:

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

LO 2: Apply knowledge from the field(s) of study to address problems in broader contexts.

LO 3: Articulate arguments or explanations to a disciplinary or professional audience in oral form.

Oral Assessment Instructions

1. Listen to the presentation, questions and student's answers
2. Fill out the table below using the following rubric and scale

Scale: 5= Excellent; 4= Good; 3= Acceptable; 2= Poor; 1= Unacceptable.

Identifies a problem in the field(s) of study	
Conveys the potential significance or intervention of the dissertation project in a broader context	
Describes how major practices, theories, or research methodologies in American Studies may relate to the dissertation project.	
Proposes a creative and realistic research plan for accomplishing and organizing the project	
Composes prose free of grammatical, mechanical, and stylistic errors	
Conveys complicated ideas clearly	
Articulates convincing case for the field's significance to American Studies.	

Total Score: _____

Reviewer's Initials: _____