SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program Name (no acronyms): American Studies	Department: American Studies
Degree or Certificate Level: PhD	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 SLO1 is the dissertation, which is described here:
>
> The American Studies PhD culminates a dissertation that makes an original argument based in primary and secondary research and demonstrates the student's knowledge of their field. It is typically 200-300 pages in length and composed of 4-6 chapters in addition to an introduction and conclusion. Typically, the introduction gives an overview of the dissertation topic, introduces the major problem or question the writer addresses, states the author's argument, situates that argument as part of a scholarly dialogue, and provides a preview of how that argument proceeds across the dissertation's chapters. The conclusion generally explains the stakes of the work that was done in the dissertation and suggests where research may proceed in the future.
>
> The indirect measure artifact of student learning used to determine if students have achieved all outcomes was a student survey. It is also attached here.
>
> The dissertation as direct assessment artifact was collected in ASTD 6990: Dissertation Research by a student's primary advisor. The survey is generally administered by the graduate coordinator near the time of a student's degree completion—although in 2023 it was administered by the department chair.

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).

> SLO1 was evaluated by rating the artifact of student learning with a rubric (attached) as a direct measure by each student's entire dissertation committee.
>
> It was also evaluated through an indirect measure, a student survey (attached), which was completed by the students electronically when they completed their degrees.
>
> In future years, this process will be overseen by the graduate coordinator, and we anticipate the early Fall meeting dedicated to assessment will allow us to proceed in the manner described in the attached revision of our assessment plan—with most of the above discussion taking place at a single meeting devoted to assessment early in the Fall semester.

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 two students complete their dissertations in 2023. The data below, as a result, is likely to be unreliable due to the small sample size. As we accrue dissertations over a longer assessment cycle, we'll be able to gather more meaningful data.
>
> SLO1: One student's work rated a 2 (Competent) by two of the three committee members, and one committee member rated it a 2.5 (between Exemplary and Competent). The other student's work rated a 3 by two of the three committee members and a 2.5 by the third.
>
> Both students rated themselves a 3—Exemplary—for SLO1, which serves as corroborating evidence for the direct measure assessment.
>
> We only offer this course 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 seems like our PhD students are sufficiently contextualizing their work (SLO1), both rating at least "Competent" overall on SLO1.

6. Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of <u>Current</u> 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 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.) 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.

One concrete step we can take to improve both our assessment practices and our students' achievement of them is to include a description of dissertation in the graduate handbook, as well as all the learning outcomes for the PhD. A lot of doctoral education tends to happen through mentoring, and while sections of the graduate handbook, when taken together, give an overview of the dissertation, what that artifact should look like is never succinctly stated as it is in our trial rubric. We tend to revise the graduate handbooks in the summer, so the earliest we can pursue this change will be for the graduate handbook ushered in for AY24-25 academic year. This could aid our students in achieving our PhD outcomes in an even more robust way.

In addition, we may also consider our data collection methods. Unlike our MA data collection, we did receive rubrics from all committee members, and exit surveys from both PhD students. Nonetheless, 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).

While the PhD students who completed their degrees in 2023 completed the student survey, if student compliance becomes an issue, the department may consider abandoning this assessment artifact. 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.

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 PhD (and BA and MA) 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. We hope that in 2023 we will begin to have that data and be able to consider any more robust changes to our PhD program.

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 last year required students to assess literature in three chosen fields and was assessed with a rubric applied to preliminary exams. First, the outcome was a vague charge, with what it meant to "assess" literature was left unclear in the outcome, although it was hinted at somewhat in the rubric. Second, since students develop their own fields, there was not necessarily a way to track whether we are falling short in training students in a certain subject area. Third, the rubric that was used for assessment did not define what constituted "excellent," "good," "acceptable," "poor," or "unacceptable" mastery of the outcome. Fourth, we did not provide much of description of what the artifact should be. Fifth, we would do better assessment about the efficacy of our PhD program as a whole if we were assessing work gathered from the end of a student's degree program.

As a result, we rewrote our learning outcomes for the PhD with, we hope, additional clarity. We limited our assessment to look at two of our most well-defined artifacts. We developed new assessment rubrics to be applied to the dissertation as an artifact for SLO1-5, and the portfolio of professional documents generated in ASTD 5900 for SLO6. These rubrics, we hope, are clearer about what constitutes mastery of the relevant outcomes. Finally, by focusing primarily on the dissertation, we can measure our students' mastery of these outcomes at the end of their degree program, rather than earlier in it.

The PhD program will probably remain small due to student funding constraints; we will likely continue to have no more than 3 students each year who complete the degree. This means to create a meaningful data set it is necessary to accumulate artifacts over a period of years. As a result, when we revised this assessment plan, we also 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. For example, 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 PhD 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 it 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 PhD 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 with 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 PhD Assessment Rubric (Dissertation)

Artifact Description: The American Studies PhD culminates a dissertation that makes an original argument based in primary and secondary research and demonstrates the student's knowledge of their field. It is typically 200-300 pages in length and composed of 4-6 chapters in addition to an introduction and conclusion. Typically, the introduction gives an overview of the dissertation topic, introduces the major problem or question the writer addresses, states the author's argument, situates that argument as part of a scholarly dialogue, and provides a preview of how that argument proceeds across the dissertation's chapters. The conclusion generally explains the stakes of the work that was done in the dissertation and suggests where research may proceed in the future.

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	The student provides a thorough, appropriate assessment of how American cultural practices,	The student thoroughly assesses how American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas shape or are shaped	The student mentions how American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas shape or are shaped by axes of power,	The student does not attend to how American cultural practices, expressions, or ideas shape or are	

by axes of power, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, or ability.	expressions, or ideas 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.	by axes of power, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, or ability, but the assessment is limited to sufficient attention to one of these frameworks.	such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, or ability, but how this occurs is not thoroughly addressed.	shaped by axes of 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 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	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	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	

	The language, style, genre, and tone are appropriate for American Studies audiences. There are no problems with spelling, punctuation, grammar, or syntax. All sources are properly documented.	argument might not 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.	language, style, 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.	an academic 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 unconvicting.	The student does not endeavor to position their worn in relation to American Studies scholarship.	

Student Name:

Survey Date:

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American Studies PhD Exit Survey

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Artifact Description: This survey is provided to students graduating with an American Studies PhD in order to gather information about the American Studies doctoral curriculum, course offerings, pedagogy, and mentoring. 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)

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)

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)

SLO4: Students will effectively articulate arguments and information for an American Studies audience.

Extremely Well (3)	Very Well (2)	Adequately (1)	Insufficiently (0)

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)

SLO 6: Students will construct a portfolio of useable professional documents such as cover letters, CVs, sample syllabi, statements of teaching philosophy, conference proposals, or grant applications.

Extremely Well (3)	Very Well (2)	Adequately (1)	Insufficiently (0)

2) What aspects of your doctoral education in American Studies helped you with your learning, and why were they helpful?

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