

**Latin American Studies Program  
Program Performance Review (PPR)  
Response to Report by External Reviewers  
Spring 2017**

This is a response to the PPR Report submitted in February 2017 by Dr. Adriana Johnson (UCD); Dr. Jacquelyn Chase (Chico State U); and Dr. João Barros (CSUF). First of all, the Latin American Studies (LAS) Program is extremely grateful to the External Reviewers for their time, helpful observations, insights, and recommendations. We believe the report adequately points to both strengths and challenges of our program and welcome the several recommendations as possible paths forward. While some of the recommendations can be acted upon immediately, others would require additional resource investment from the College and University.

*Overall Strengths*

The LAS Program coincides with the External Reviewers in that the Program has many areas of strength. It is located in a strategic area where many students feel the strong ties to Latin America. Furthermore, we believe that the Program has a crucial role in the University to meet students' interests as well as provide students with the opportunity to become an important part of the labor force, and a global community, especially in a large Hispanic Serving Institution such as CSUF. These opportunities align with the University Goals and Strategies. We are also conscious that an important aspect of our program is its interdisciplinary nature as the reviewers point out. Students certainly benefit from the wide range of courses offered, as they are exposed to various disciplines allowing them to design and pursue their own interests within the study of Latin America. Similarly, we, the faculty, feel that we are deeply interested and engaged in student success, and the diverse disciplines we represent serves to provide opportunities for students to conduct research, deepen their appreciation on Latin America, and become more engaged global citizens. Not to mention that the interdisciplinary nature of our program provides us also, the "space" to communicate with faculty from other departments and colleges and share our mutual interests involving Latin America. Finally, we also coincide in noting the minimal resources needed to support the program

*Weaknesses Addressed*

The External Reviewers indicated two weaknesses. The first one is low numbers of majors and minors. The LAS Program is also aware of the fluctuation in numbers of majors and minors. Current numbers are not as strong as in previous years. In order to gear the program towards a growth trend, the program sees two main obstacles: the availability of more resources and a concerted effort to promote the program and recruit students. Regarding the former, the coordinator continues to be constrained by lack of time. This inevitably is tied to the expected growth. If there is more support in this regard, one can expect that there would be a noticeable increase in numbers. As for the later, efforts are being made, but will continue to do so even more actively, to promote the Program and recruit more students. The second weakness that was pointed out was the "free floating" nature of the program. This is a double-edged sword. Although it is important to understand that the interdisciplinary nature of the program—pointed out previously as

a strength—would most adequately be represented by this “free floating” nature by not belonging to one department in particular but as a shared “space” of dialogue and freedom to choose, the challenges faced by the Program as pointed out by the External Reviewers do shed light towards some concerns that will be addressed. First, regarding the fact that the LAS program does not have a permanent faculty member tied to an RTP process, is certainly a major one. The coordinator position is quite challenging, as it requires time commitment to go over the excessive bureaucratic hurdles, to increase the number of majors and minors, to give visibility to the program, and to deal with curricular issues. A permanent faculty member, specific for the program, tied to an RTP process would be key to address this issue. For this, there will be a need for resources and a willingness to move forward to recruit such a faculty. Secondly, regarding the conflict faculty face in creating and teaching classes for their home and for the LAS program, we believe that unfortunately, the program has no say. It would be up to the faculty members to push for more courses focusing on Latin America in the individual departments, unless a Department of LAS (or an equivalent) is created. Ideally, council members and other faculty would be working on creating new courses in order to include them in the LAS course list for our students. The third concern pointed out might be related in part to the visibility and recognition of our program. Departments in the university should recognize the activities of the council members as not only serving an academic division/area of the University but also as contributing to the goals of globalization put forth by the Strategic Plan of CSUF. Fourthly, as the External Reviewers point out, the lack of exclusive space for LAS students and the program is also a concern. This has been repeatedly demanded in previous PPR reports. Unfortunately, the space that was provided was taken back by the H&SS Dean’s office. It is important to have this physical space available since it creates a sense of belonging for students and gives visibility to our program. Finally, there is the concern of having a small budget. The availability of resources is fundamental in order to run our program. With the intention to move forward, adopt, and put into place some of the recommendations by the External Reviewers which will be discussed below, there is a need to increase the budget and resources to address the specific needs of the program. This will be possible only with the support from the College and the University, as well as with the exploration of outside funding (provided the time needed to pursue funding is taken into account). As the report mentions, by addressing the weaknesses of the program, we hope that we can reach our full potential in numerical terms and also in our fundamental role within our academic community.

#### *Recommendations from the External Reviewers and the Program’s Path Forward*

The External Reviewers have pointed out four possible paths as recommendations to move forward. As was indicated in the introduction, some can be adopted and implemented immediately whereas others have to be further discussed within the Program Council as well as other colleagues involved, and carefully planned and executed.

The first recommendation is to keep the Program “as-is” with its “free-floating” nature. However, it was suggested that some small changes could be made to boost the number of majors and minors. We think that these changes are plausible and can be implemented immediately. For instance, the collaboration with College marketing specialists to make our Program more visible is something that will be enacted immediately. The plan will be to point out the relative ease to complete a LAS minor in combination with a Spanish major (and other related majors), or to have students clearly see the possibilities of doing a double-major. Once the LAS double-major and minor options are clearly mapped out, we can strategically distribute promotional material as well as spread the word through a University-wide distribution list and social media. As for the LTAM 100

course, it is now officially in the University Catalog and we will be offering it as soon as possible so that incoming freshmen can be exposed to LAS as soon as possible and make this a recruitment tool.

The second recommendation is to establish a faculty Think Tank. We coincide with the External Reviewers in that this could give the Program more visibility, draw in more faculty members who are not part of the Program Council, and recruit students interested in working with faculty. It can also serve the purpose of organizing speaker series and events. This Think Tank will provide the students with more opportunities to work with faculty and will be of little cost. Linked to the Think Tank idea is further collaboration with the University Honors Program where indeed the current director is a Latin Americanist, the only full-time lecturer is a Brazilian whose research specialty is Latin American History, and all honors students engage in interdisciplinary learning as a mandatory part of the program while they complete a senior honors project. Thus, Honors students who are interested may choose the Latin America Think Tank as a natural place to house their research while collaborating with engaging faculty from various departments. Although this idea is plausible, we have to discuss it amongst the Program Council members to determine what shape it would take. Would it be something parallel to the LAS major or minor degrees? Would it mean getting rid of the degrees? Would it be creating an equivalent to a resource center focusing on research? As of now, this recommendation requires further conversation in order to come up with a plausible and sustainable plan.

The third possibility is to offer an M.A. degree in LAS. This recommendation offers quite a unique and interesting perspective. Traditionally, the way to proceed has been to have a solid B.A. program and then engage in discussions of offering an M.A. program. However, what this recommendation offers is the possibility of “thinking outside the box” and attracting more majors. There is certainly a possibility that if students see that there is an M.A. degree in LAS that they can pursue after obtaining their B.A., it would give our Program more visibility and attract more students. As the report mentions, it is true that we have had students majoring in LAS wanting to continue on with an M.A. degree but have limited options. By having an M.A. program, it would allow these students to stay and pursue their graduate degree at CSUF. Furthermore, it will help students want to major and not only obtain a minor in LAS. Many students do realize that they can minor in LAS late in their undergraduate career, and by having a graduate degree in place, they might be more willing to take more courses to obtain a major in LAS, and among those, have some excess upper-division units count towards their M.A. Furthermore, there are already established ties with departments that offer graduate courses such as History that could play an important role in molding a new M.A. degree in LAS. Even though the idea is certainly unique and would help to give visibility to the Program while increasing recruitment, the feasibility seems very much tied to the available resources, the leadership of the Program Council members, and securing of necessary resources at the college level.

Finally, the fourth recommendation has to do with the reconfiguration of the LAS Program to form a department, which includes other departments and programs or the creation of something like a Hemispheric Studies Department. We see that conversations with the possible departments and programs involved can start to take place immediately regardless of the outcome. We also agree that it could potentially undercut the interdisciplinary nature of the program for which careful planning is necessary. Again, this possibility will be discussed within the Council. It would require support from the Dean’s office to facilitate dialogue and collaboration among colleagues in Spanish, Portuguese, Latin American Studies, and Chicana/o Studies.

### *Conclusion*

Our program is grateful for the reviewers' thoughtful assessment of our current situation. We certainly agree that we still have not reached our full potential and that there are possible paths to move forward. We look forward to working with the College and University to create a more visible and sustainable LAS Program that serves the needs of CSUF students and furthers the University's Mission and Goals.