

**California State University, Fullerton**  
**Program Performance Review: Latin American Studies**

**External Review Report**

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**Review Team Members**

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**THE REVIEW PROCESS**

The external review report is based on the self-study for the Latin American Studies (LAS) program and a site visit. The self-study report, reviewed by the review team prior to the site visit, was prepared by Dr. Juan R. Ishikawa, program coordinator, for the 2017 Program Performance Review. The site visit occurred on Friday, February 17, 2017 and included meetings with Dr. Sheryl Fontaine, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences (H&SS); Dr. Lynn Sargeant, Associate Dean of H&SS; program administrative staff, Kim Bette and Priscilla Towns; selected program council faculty (Dr. Sandra Pérez, Dr. Stephen Neufeld, Dr. Enric Mallorquí-Ruscalleda, Dr. Denise Stanley, Dr. Robert Voeks) from various CSUF departments; current and former Latin American Studies Major and Minor students; and Dr. Juan R. Ishikawa, program coordinator.

The report is divided into three sections: **Section I** highlights the program's strengths; **Section II** focuses on the areas identified as weaknesses by the review team; and **Section III** includes the review team's recommendations.

**I. STRENGTHS**

The review team was able to observe several areas of strength in the LAS program.

**The LAS program clearly aligns with CSUF's Goals and Strategies.** Southern California and a large number of CSUF students have strong cultural and economic ties to Latin America. CSUF aims to nourish and capitalize on those ties. Students mentioned these ties were a factor in their decision to pursue a major/minor in LAS. The LAS program has the potential to play a strategic role for the university and to meet the region's workforce demands and student interest.

**The program's interdisciplinary nature** was cited as a strength during meetings with the Dean's office, program coordinator, members of the faculty program council, and the students. Although there are few courses specifically designed for the LAS program (LTAM 100, 300), the courses included in the curriculum available to students pursuing LAS major/minor is current, truly interdisciplinary, varied, and flexible. However, the interdisciplinary nature of the program also imposes important administrative concerns that will be discussed in the following section.

**The low cost of the program for the university** was also perceived as a strength. This too, however, might impose significant barriers that will be discussed in the following section.

The review team met seven current and former LAS major/minor students. Given the low enrollment numbers presented in the self-study, the number of student we had the chance to meet was a pleasant surprise. Their effort to be there and their comments, made it clear that **the students value the LAS program**. They specifically mentioned the flexibility of the curriculum that allowed them to pursue their individual interests; the quality of the courses; and the quality of the faculty who are part of the LAS program. Students praised and sought out the opportunity to study Latin America broadly and not be limited to Mexico. For example, the availability of Brazil-focused curriculum and of Portuguese are appreciated. Students also suggested that if CSUF offered a Master's degree in Latin American Studies, they would pursue it (see further below on this topic).

Another area of strength is **the faculty that compose the large and diverse program council**. The breadth of areas represented in the program council allow for the interdisciplinary, varied and flexible LAS curriculum. Students we talked to attributed their pursuit of a LAS major or minor to specific faculty members and the classes they taught. The faculty, generally speaking, were very productive in their individual research and, despite having different "home departments," seemed to collaborate with great enthusiasm and collegiality. Students respect the faculty and are inspired by them. Our meeting with students who had finished or were in the process of receiving a minor or major in Latin American Studies made it clear that the faculty provides a truly excellent—indeed life changing--education that goes beyond the classroom. For example, students have worked closely with faculty to participate in a CSU San Bernardino Latin American Studies conference. It is notable that Dr. Ishikawa is promoting a Fullerton "Crossroads/Encrucijadas/Cruzamentos" conference this spring for which a call for papers has gone out to students. The faculty demonstrated great interest in maintaining the program, despite recognizing the declining enrollment numbers.

## **II. WEAKNESSES**

From the review committee's perspective, the LAS program has some notable areas for improvement.

**The very low numbers of major/minor students are a major concern.** The enrollment numbers have been steadily declining since the last program review. Since these low/decreasing enrollment numbers are not typical for the college, it is difficult to attribute them to a broad lack of interest from students in the humanities or social sciences. The meeting with students also seems to indicate that lack of interest does not seem to be the main driving cause of the low enrollment.

Faculty and staff have suggested that **the “free floating” nature of the program is potentially the source of some of the challenges the program faces.** Since it is not attached to any specific department the program faces numerous challenges: 1) the lack of ability to hire faculty specifically for the program; 2) the conflict faculty face in creating and teaching classes for the home department and for the LAS program; 3) the lack of recognition for LAS program activities in Retention Tenure and Promotion (RTP) processes by the faculty’s home department; 4) the lack of an exclusive space for LAS students to congregate and seek information about the program; 5) the small budget to support LAS program activities. As mentioned earlier in this document the true interdisciplinary nature of the program is one of its strengths but it creates administrative concerns that might be limiting the program from reaching its full potential.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

We see various possible paths forward.

1) The program could **continue as it is**, as a free-floating, low-cost program which brings together faculty from different disciplines and provides a small, select group of undergraduate majors and minors with a high-quality, intense educational experience with opportunities for collaboration with the faculty involved. Recent cuts to the program’s budget (including, perhaps most importantly, less time off for directing the program) and the loss of office space which used to bring students together diminishes the chance of ever breaking beyond the small scale of the program.

Nonetheless, small changes could be made to boost student majors such as working with the college’s marketing specialist for promotional materials and permanent displays. Students commented on the ease of completing a LAS minor along with a Spanish major, given the Spanish major’s relatively low unit requirements and we believe that specific promotional materials on a Spanish major/LAS minor (or alternately LAS major/Spanish minor) combination should be developed and distributed to students in Spanish classes, in mass emails to majors, and on other online spaces such as Facebook pages and department websites.

The current proposal for a LTAM 100 course also seems like a wise decision to expose students to Latin American Studies as freshmen rather than simply as juniors through the LTAM300 course (students vigorously supported the existence of a second “core” course which would come earlier in a student’s career); this course might also boost the current number of majors/minors.

2) Given the excellence, diversity and strong student-focused culture of the LAS faculty, the reviewers noted the potential to establish a faculty **think tank** in Latin American Studies. This could raise the visibility of the work these professors do and give corpus to what is already strong cohesion and scholarly collaboration among the faculty and with students. A think tank could draw in faculty who have not yet become part of the council and it could recruit students interested in working with faculty. More on-campus speaker series and the continuation of the annual conference on Latin American Studies would also bring students and faculty together and would likely attract more of the kinds of

talented and articulate students who we met and who felt that the only thing missing was more Latin American Studies courses, as noted above, and more opportunities to work with faculty. There is potential—at very little cost—to develop ties between an enthusiastic group of faculty eager to work together and with students, and with the Honors Program which is now run by one of the Latin American Studies councilmembers and former LAS coordinator, Dr. Sandra Perez.

3) Although this program has experienced low enrollments, it has been populated by highly self-selective and ambitious students who wish to deepen their connection to their culture, heritage, and language. A natural outcome of such a space for research and student-faculty collaboration would be to offer a **M.A. degree**. Although it may seem out of place in a program review of the B.A. program in Latin American Studies, this idea emerged from our discussion with students and alumni who said they would commit to a graduate degree at Fullerton if one were available. As they told us, many Fullerton students cannot leave for graduate programs elsewhere because of commitments to family, work and home.

These students said that an MA program could give the BA more visibility and attract more students who often discover the BA late in their undergraduate career. At graduation they feel they have not had enough LAS. As they explained it, if there was an MA degree they could move into, students might be more willing to declare the undergraduate major. Some CSU campuses allow for a limited number of upper division units to apply towards an MA degree. This information could be worked into recruiting efforts at both the BA and MA levels.

4) Finally, another option that arose in conversations throughout the day and which we believe merits consideration and further discussion would involve a **reconfiguration** in which faculty of Spanish and Portuguese in Modern Language and Literatures would combine with Chicano Studies to form a new department of Spanish/Portuguese, Chicano Studies and Latin American Studies or possibly even something like a Hemispheric Studies Department (with three separate majors). This could be pursued in combination with some or all of the previously mentioned suggestions. This new configuration could have interesting potential for growth since the combination of the three could boost the legibility of the programs: it could attract both first and second generation immigrants and articulate bridges between them (students commented that first generation immigrants tend to be more interested in Latin America rather than a US-based Chicano Studies).

This option could create a new perception among students that the learning of Spanish and Portuguese is less narrowly tied to literary studies but has the potential for connecting to questions of history, politics and economics (this broader scope was what attracted students to the LAS major). It could, finally, provide a sense of location and stability to Latin American Studies. If it were housed in a department, rather than existing as a free-floating major, service to the program would count for cases of merit and promotion. If this option were to be pursued, care would have to be given to not undercut the truly interdisciplinary nature of the program, so that faculty from History or Economics, for example, would continue to feel like valuable members of the program. The current configuration of a college that includes the humanities and social sciences makes this interdisciplinary goal feasible, as does the synergy that is already present in the curriculum and classes for Chicano Studies and Latin American Studies.