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To: Su Swarat, Associate Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness

From: Dr. Sheryl Fontaine, Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences and Associate Dean of Student Relations, Dr. Jessica Stern

Date: May 16, 2022

Subject: Dean's Summary and Evaluation of the American Studies BA and MA

The Department of American Studies is a dynamic interdisciplinary department with twelve tenure/tenure-track faculty and seventeen lecturers. As of the Spring 2022 census they have 80 majors, 46 minors, and 36 graduate students. The department plays a key role in providing CSUF undergraduate students with general education courses throughout the social sciences, humanities, and American Institutions. More recently, the faculty have begun developing coursework in the interdisciplinary Explore Core series and in the upper-division GE category BA: Implications and Exploration of Mathematics and Natural Sciences. Both their undergraduate and graduate programs prepare students for a wide array of post-completion paths. In addition, the faculty maintain rigorous research agendas, have won prestigious grants, and created award-winning publications and digital projects.

From our perspective, the department is thriving in large part because it takes full advantage of its interdisciplinarity by both participating in, and developing, innovative programs (Explore Core, HSS 100, CSUF-King Reading Partnership). They have a clear vision of their value to campus and their mission to engage our diverse student body in applying habits of intellectual inquiry to understanding American culture in the past and present. This clarity of mission has resulted in their developing for their majors (and the campus) timely academic programming (E.g. teach-ins on hate crimes, police killings, January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection). They are remarkably collegial and supportive of one other, an atmosphere in which the faculty and students flourish.

### **Curriculum and Pedagogy**

We echo the External Review Team's claim that the American Studies BA is an exemplary, interdisciplinary program that highlights the change of American culture over time and the plethora of peoples who built that culture. The department takes pride in its teaching and in its commitment to equitable pedagogies. As the Self Study notes, faculty take full advantage of the FDC and OET trainings and are recognized for these efforts in teaching awards and grants. Of note, when the 2020 Assessment Inquiry Grant analysis showed that students were performing less well in online classes the faculty in American Studies used campus resources in their investment to become better online teachers.



Both the MA and BA programs are built upon a carefully crafted sequence of core courses that allow students to build and master the learning outcomes the department has identified and then to develop additional expertise by completing a very broad range of electives. For undergraduates, 12 units make up the core and the remaining 24 units are electives grouped in two plans through which students chart their paths with the help of undergraduate faculty advisors. Along with the External Review committee, we are impressed by the new courses that the department has created since the last PPR to capitalize on the expertise of their faculty: Americans at Work, American Technocultures, America Nightlife, Creative Work in American Studies, Digital Work, Fear and Fantasy, Migrant Lives, Fashion in America, and Science in America.

As is normal with any program, curriculum regularly need to be reconsidered and refreshed. The PPR process, with the insight of specialists off campus, provides a rare opportunity for the department to brainstorm changes. The External Review Team notes, for instance, that the new courses developed and mentioned above should be integrated more fully into the curriculum so that the changes are holistic rather than additive. For the MA Program, the Department sets as a priority the re-examination of reading lists and the consideration of a project as one of the culminating options for students. The department notes that they might use the External Review Team suggestion to diversity requirements for culminating BA projects for the MA program as well. The External Review Team noted that faculty and students with whom they met, were not able to explain the value to some curricular options: theme and discipline approaches; distinctions between some survey courses; rationale requiring certain core courses. We are here to support the department through the Curriculog process as they start discussing their course titles, descriptions, and curricular structure. Associate Dean Stern could host a workshop for the participating faculty as they input changes. Looking forward to changes in the capstone, Dr. Stern will continue to work with Senior Director of Extension and International Programs to discuss summer exceptions of graduating-senior capstones and with the department.

### **Student Recruitment, Retention, Graduation, and Post-Completion**

American Studies is largely a “found major” for undergraduate students. Few transfer students, and even fewer first-time students, have been exposed to the field of American Studies before they apply to CSUF and thus do not apply to CSUF to enter as American Studies majors. Between Fall 19-22 an average of 27 first-time and transfer students have applied to enter as American Studies majors, with an average of 15 of those being offer admissions and 6 of those ultimately enrolling. Yet between 51-87 students graduated with American Studies BA degrees between 2017-21. What this means is that American Studies, both through much deliberate effort and because of their engaging and inspiring courses and faculty, have successfully recruited students to add American Studies as a double major or change their major to American Studies. As the PPR documents note, however, the number of American Studies minors and majors is declining. Compared to the other programs in the College of HSS, American Studies lost the second highest percentage of students in Spring 2022 compared to Spring 2021. The External Review Team hypothesizes that recruitment of students in virtual classes may be harder than recruitment of students in high-touch in-person classes. The Department should work with Institutional Research to study this question and incorporate those findings into scheduling decisions. The Department seems satisfied with their MA cohort size and yield of admitted students. While the department had a significantly lower number of applicants in Fall 2019, all other years are relatively stable. The grad rate of Graduate Students, on the other hand, has decreased



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significantly, with only 43.8% of the 2017 cohort receiving their MA in four years compared to 70% of the 2015 cohort and 54.5% of the 2016 cohort. It is possible that this was because COVID impacted the final year of these cohorts, but the department should monitor and assess student graduation patterns.

The effort the full-time faculty invest in undergraduate recruitment is extraordinary, with faculty presenting on their programs to over twenty classes a semester. As the External Review Team notes, this work runs the danger of leading to faculty burnout. Looking at major and minor numbers before and after the Department began intensively investing in the process of revising GE courses leads us to wonder whether this labor-intensive practice has paid off in proportional numbers of majors and whether the Department instead would be better served by developing more targeted recruitment in key feeder courses or with specific student populations. The Department has already engaged in studying this recruitment question with their Assessment Inquiry Grant report in 2020. A Dean's Office study requested as part of that grant looked at student recruitment and retention between Summer 2012-2018 (see their summary in the Self Study Appendix III.A.). That study revealed some trends that may help further target the recruitment. As the department notes in the Self Study, one major finding was the connection with the College of Communications; 68 of the total 149 minors who declared during 2012-18 were majors in CCOMM. The Department's idea of building explicit roadmaps in partnership with programs that would facilitate students minoring and double-majoring is an excellent one. Another major finding was that 20% of the students who declared American Studies after entering CSUF were undeclared, suggesting another avenue of targeted outreach.

According to the Alumni Workforce Outcomes Dashboard available through Institutional Research, where 313 American Studies BA alumni and 96 American Studies MA alumni who graduated over the past fifty years have been identified, most students who earn BAs and MAs in American Studies work in the education sector. According to the dashboard, students who don't pursue a career in education go on to use their management, public speaking, leadership, and research skills in professions ranging from chief executives (11), human resource specialists and managers (9) public relations specialists and fundraising managers (5), to producers and directors (3).

We acknowledge and applaud the department for creating more avenues for students to reflect on, and develop the skills needed, to pursue these diverse careers. Faculty have developed courses that allow students to reflect on work-place and industry culture (AMST 403, AMST 425). Since their last review the department has created an optional internship for graduate students (AMST 595), which can fulfill the skill elective requirement; revised AMST 501 to include content on CVs, conference abstracts, and cover letters; and developed panels and workshops on post-completion. Dr. Gonzaba was able to hire and train seven MA students in the methods and practice of digital humanities through his "Mapping the Gay Guides" project. As the External Review Team notes, coordinating internships can be a heavy burden. If American Studies is able to concentrate at least 8 graduate students in AMST 595 or ten undergraduate students in 495 in a semester, and assign one instructor to this internship section, this could serve as a 3WTU course. SOCI, PSYC, and PAJ use this course model. If the student numbers don't support this structure, the department could count oversight of internships as the "fourth-course" service requirement of a faculty member. The internship coordinators could also continue applying for the Assigned Time for Exceptional Service award to support this work. The College is considering creating an internship/post-completion preparation course that would



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be open to undergrad students from majors that don't offer such an opportunity. We invite the department to consider the possibility of integrating their internships into this course as well. The department requests a permanent source of funding for Graduate Assistants. We agree that working as a GA provides students with valuable teaching and research experience. Unfortunately, the college has no direct funding for GA's. American Studies could, as have some other departments, use the CourseMatch money for GAs. The department could also partner with departments in the college that don't have MA programs but are in need of graduate student assistance.

### **Faculty**

We commend the department on hiring four new tenure-track faculty since the last PPR, the high retention rates of faculty, and the successful promotion and tenure rates of faculty. It is clear that the new faculty feel supported and that their contributions to the department, college, and University are valued. According to the college tenure-density metric, American Studies is eligible to request a search, and we will support that process when initiated.

We appreciate how attentive the department is being towards faculty burnout and the approach the department is taking in these discussions. All tenure/tenure-track faculty in the College are on a 3-3 load, and our college funded SFR is 25. Given how important it is for the college to meet target as it maintains this teaching load, the college cannot fund additional assigned time. Creating governing principles and transparent processes that work to create an equal service load is a key. We commend the department for making these discussions a priority at their up-coming retreat. The revisions of their Departmental Personnel Standards, which will incorporate UPS 100.007: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice, may also provide avenues to acknowledge and reward work that is currently invisible.

Another area that impacts faculty workload is the department course caps, which seem higher for similar-level GE courses in the college, particularly at the lower-division level. The department exceeded their target in 21-22, which may mean that they can adjust their course caps down and still meet their FTES target. The Dean's Office would like to explore this possibility further with the department.

As the External Review Team notes the lecturers' morale is high. Yet even with the attention that chairs have given to their lecturer colleagues, there is a sense of division between the lecturers and full-time faculty. We agree that the department should prioritize discussing lecturer equity by examining their policies regarding lecturers and their role in department governance. In the past, when budgets have permitted, the College provided professional development funds to each lecturer who is in the first year of their three-year entitlement. Departments may also use O&E and CourseMatch money for this purpose when the college is unable to do so.

### **Staff**

We appreciate the department's attentiveness to staff. The University and College are investing much effort in determining how to improve the working conditions of staff at CSUF. To this end, Academic Affairs is in the process of reevaluating the telecommute policy and recently announced that during summer staff may participate in a 9-80 alternate work schedule. We also acknowledge the desire to create more professional



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development opportunities and to continue exploring avenues by which staff can achieve increased responsibility and job growth.

### **Space**

We are sorry to hear about the poor state of some of the lecturer and faculty offices. In the future, please reach out to the Dean's Office if Facilities is not being responsive so we can elevate the request. We are working on the issues mentioned in the PPR. We recognize the difficulty you are experiencing because you are so spread out from one other and because of the limited mix-use space that you share with Religious Studies. We will keep American Studies need in mind if these space opportunities become available.

In summary, we commend the the faculty in American Studies on the progress the department has made since their last Program Performance Review and look forward to seeing the plans and goals identified in this Program Performance Review take shape.