

# Data-Based Decisions: Master of Arts/Sciences in American Studies (Standard Specialization)

## 2017-18

The American Studies faculty is currently in the process of reviewing and revising the graduate program, and we will be working closely with this assessment data throughout this process.

1. **Data indicating problem:** Students did not do well on the third objective in the required American Studies class (ENGL/HIST 6600) in Spring 2018, which is “Conduct effective research, locating and analyzing primary and secondary sources using appropriate methods dictated by the relevant discipline(s).” Of a total of 8 students, 5 students achieved medium proficiency and only 3 achieved high proficiency, as evident in IV.A. (*outcomes—link here*).

**Discussion:** In Sept. 2018, the Director of American Studies discussed this issue with the AS faculty. In 2019, ENGL/HIST 6600 will be completely redesigned to be taught alongside ENGL 6700 (Introduction to Folklore Studies) as part of the new requirements for the merged Folklore and American Studies program. We discussed ways that this redesigned course can lead to improved outcomes regarding effective research and working with primary/secondary sources in relation to specific disciplinary perspectives.

**Proposed Solution:** When redesigning this course, the instructors will focus attention on designing a set of multiple assignments that require effective research and working with primary/secondary sources in relation to specific disciplinary perspectives. By offering more than one assignment, students will get more practice with these skills. These assignments will also allow students to build their skills toward more advanced goals and outcomes.

**Future Evaluation of Solution:** The AS curriculum committee will evaluate the data collected for this objective with the assessment materials collected for the 2018-19 academic year.

1. **Data indicating problem:** For 2017-18, the assessment data for IV.D (*outcomes—link here*) indicate that students continue to be hesitant to venture outside the English Department for their course work. Only one student took courses outside of the English Dept. in 2017-18, which showed significant decline from the previous year. Although the data for IV.D for 2016-17 indicates that the majority of students taking courses in the English dept. are pursuing coursework in different areas of

emphasis, we feel that this is *not* enough disciplinary diversity for an effective interdisciplinary program.

**Discussion:** During a faculty meeting in Nov. 2018, AS faculty discussed how to improve the disciplinary range of coursework within the graduate program. The faculty considered creating a new requirement that AS graduate students must take at least one course outside of the English dept. as part of their program of study. The director of the American Studies program (Keri Holt) also felt that it was important to continue distributing a list of all AS graduate courses outside of the English dept. that are offered each semester.

**Proposed action:** The Director of the American Studies program (Keri Holt) will continue compiling and distributing lists of AS courses outside the English dept. each semester to provide students with more information about the different courses they can register for. We will also require all incoming AS students to take at least one course outside of the English dept., beginning in 2019-20.

**Future evaluation of action:** The graduate AS Curriculum Committee will continue to monitor the graduating students' Programs of Study to how interdisciplinarity is reflected in students' coursework within the assessment data collected for 2018-19.

4. **Data indicating improvement:** Based on the program overview, students are taking 4.3 semesters to graduate, which shows significant improvement from 2016-17, when the time to graduation was 5.5 semesters but is still behind the expected length of completion is 4 semesters.

**Discussion:** Last year, the American Studies program began monitoring the progress of its graduate students closely to make sure they were meeting the benchmarks for completing the degree in four semesters. The director of the program met with each student in the fall and spring semester to remind them of the deadlines for completing a thesis proposal and a thesis defense, and this seemed to work well to keep the students on track for timely completion. Five out of the six graduating students completed their degree in 4 semesters. This year's delayed graduation rate was due to one student who had been admitted to the program on a delayed timetable due to his status as a full-time director of a business. It was expected that he would complete his degree in 6 semesters, which he did.

**Proposed Solution:** Next year, the director of the AS program will continue to monitor the progress of its graduate students closely to make sure they meet the benchmarks for completing the degree in four semesters. The director will continue to meet with each student in the fall and spring semesters to remind them of the deadlines for completing a thesis proposal and a thesis defense, and we anticipate that this will continue to be an effective means of ensuring completion of the program in 4 semesters.

**Future Evaluation of Solution:** The director of the American Studies program will monitor the dates of completion for thesis proposals for Fall 2018 and the completion of thesis defenses in Spring 2019.

1. **Data indicating improvement:** Thesis proposals: For 2016-17, Outcomes IV.B revealed that one student achieved lower results ("Pass with major revisions" and "fail") on thesis proposal defenses and two students received high proficiency ("Pass with minor revisions" and "Pass with no revisions). For 2017-1, 0 students achieved

lower results for proposal defenses (“Pass with major revisions”) and 9 students received high proficiency (“Pass with minor revisions” and “Pass with no revisions”). Thesis defenses: For 2016-17, Outcomes IV.C revealed that 3 students received high proficiency (“Pass with minor revisions” and “Pass with no revisions), although all 3 received “Pass with minor revisions,” which contrasts with the results for 2017-18, where 6 students received high proficiency (“Pass with minor revisions” and “Pass with no revisions), with only 2 received “Pass with minor revisions” and 4 received “Pass with no revisions,” which indicates that our students are passing their thesis defenses at a higher level across the board.

**Discussion:** In Nov. 2018, the American Studies faculty discussed these results and were very pleased with the improvement. The Director of Graduate Studies has been offering workshops on thesis proposals, which seems to have helped students meet the requirements for this document. Responsibility for chairing theses is also more evenly distributed, and this has likely led to improved guidance and attention for students completing their proposals and defending their theses at a higher level.

**Proposed action:** The committee agreed to continue to support this improvement in the following ways:

- We will continue holding exit interviews in Spring 2019, during which faculty will ask students to describe in detail their thesis experience.
- The Director of Graduate Studies will continue to offer a graduate student workshop (or several workshops, depending on student interest) in the 2018-2019 school year on writing effective proposals.
- Instructors for 6600 will include a class session that addresses the thesis proposal (expectations, formats, criteria, and deadlines). The instructor may consider inviting the director of the American Studies program to give a presentation and lead a discussion on this issue.

**Future evaluation of action:** Faculty will continue to discuss this issue and monitor data and results in 2018-2019.

- After conducting exit interviews in Spring 2019, faculty will meet to discuss the students’ suggestions and comments.
- The Director of Graduate Studies will take informal surveys of students after workshops to see how helpful students rate the information they receive.
- In Spring 2019, faculty will review the year’s thesis proposal defense results to see if students’ performances are improving.