

Assessment Plan: American Studies

To determine the effectiveness of the department's degree, the American Studies BA/BS degree developed an assessment plan built around measuring student work vis-à-vis three key learning objectives.

American Studies collects annual data from the academic year (spring semester, fall semester) by gathering senior papers from its courses and designating faculty readers from its curriculum committee to assess the student work in relation to the key learning objectives. At the end of Fall Semester, the committee evaluates the papers and posts its Outcomes Data on the department's assessment website. Each emphasis then makes decisions on the basis of this data and delineates its Data-Based Decisions on the assessment website. Along with this direct measure of student learning, American Studies also employs an indirect measure, student interviews, as well.

For the American Studies BA/BS degrees, the three key Learning Objectives are:

1. Reach compelling conclusions through the development of critical arguments, professional documents, or creative texts
2. Weigh alternative systems of thought or approaches, recognizing their assumptions and implications
3. Communicate ideas effectively through writing

PART 1 of 2: DIRECT MEASURES (Rubric of Student Work)

The faculty committee uses the following three rubrics to score the skill levels of the students.

1. Reach compelling conclusions through the development of critical arguments

Unacceptable:

Evidence that the student has mastered this objective is not provided, is unconvincing, or very incomplete

Student work does not demonstrate a basic understanding of how to reach compelling conclusions in the following specific areas:

- Comes to a **conclusion**
- Conclusion is **convincing**
- Provides **textual support** for the conclusion

Marginal:

Evidence that the student has mastered this objective is provided, but it is weak or incomplete

Work shows evidence that the student understands the concept of writing for an audience, but execution of the concept is weak or incomplete in the following specific areas:

- Comes to a **conclusion**
- Conclusion is **convincing**
- Provides **textual support** for the conclusion

Acceptable:

Evidence shows that the student has generally attained the objective

Work shows evidence that the student understands the concept of writing for an audience and does so with competence in the following specific areas:

- Comes to a **conclusion**
- Conclusion is **convincing**
- Provides **textual support** for the conclusion

Exceptional:

Evidence demonstrates that the student has mastered this objective at a high level

Work shows evidence that the student not only understands the concept of writing for an audience but also does so at a highly proficient level, as defined by these specific areas:

- Comes to an **original and convincing conclusion**
- **Artfully** presents **textual support** for the conclusion
- Anticipates and **compellingly addresses potential resistances** on the part of the reader

2. Weigh alternative systems of thought or approaches, recognizing their assumptions and implications

Unacceptable:

Evidence that the student has mastered this objective is not provided, is unconvincing, or very incomplete

Student work does not demonstrate a basic understanding of alternative approaches in the following specific areas:

- Refers to **alternative approaches**
- Refers to the **assumptions** behind the approaches
- Refers to **implications** of the approaches

Marginal:

Evidence that the student has mastered this objective is provided, but it is weak or incomplete

Work shows evidence that the student understands alternative approaches, but execution of the concept is weak or incomplete in the following specific areas:

- Refers to **alternative approaches**
- Refers to the **assumptions** behind the approaches
- Refers to **implications** of the approaches

Acceptable:

Evidence shows that the student has generally attained the objective

Work shows evidence that the student understands the concept of writing for an audience and does so with competence in the following specific areas:

- Refers to **alternative approaches**
- Refers to the **assumptions** behind the approaches
- Refers to **implications** of the approaches

Exceptional:

Evidence demonstrates that the student has mastered this objective at a high level

Work shows evidence that the student not only understands alternative approaches but also does so at a highly proficient level, as defined by these specific areas:

- Refers to **alternative approaches** in a way that is particularly **compelling, engaging, or artful**
- Refers to the **assumptions** behind the approaches in a way that lends **new insight** into the approach
- Refers to implications of the approaches in a way that is particularly **compelling, engaging, or artful**

3. Communicate ideas effectively in writing

Unacceptable:	Marginal:	Acceptable:	Exceptional:
<p>Evidence that the student has mastered this objective is not provided, is unconvincing, or very incomplete</p> <hr/> <p>Student work does not demonstrate a basic understanding of how to communicate ideas effectively in the following specific areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free of problems at the sentence level (syntax, usage, grammar)• Clear and descriptive language• Writing flows well from paragraph to paragraph	<p>Evidence that the student has mastered this objective is provided, but it is weak or incomplete</p> <hr/> <p>Work shows evidence that the student understands how to communicate ideas effectively but the execution is weak or incomplete in the following specific areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free of problems at the sentence level (syntax, usage, grammar)• Clear and descriptive language• Writing flows well from paragraph to paragraph	<p>Evidence shows that the student has generally attained the objective</p> <hr/> <p>Work shows evidence that the student understands how to communicate ideas effectively in the following specific areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free of problems at the sentence level (syntax, usage, grammar)• Clear and descriptive language• Writing flows well from paragraph to paragraph	<p>Evidence demonstrates that the student has mastered this objective at a high level</p> <hr/> <p>Work shows evidence that the student understands how to communicate ideas effectively and does so at a highly proficient level, as defined by these specific areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free of problems at the sentence level (syntax, usage, grammar)• Clear and descriptive and vivid language (sophisticated word choice)• Writing flows well from idea to idea via particularly artful transitions

PART 2 of 2: INDIRECT MEASURES (Rubric of Student Work)

Graduating seniors participate in an exit interview that is designed to evaluate the extent to which students feel they have met the goals of the program and solicit their views regarding the current curriculum and policies of the program and ideas for future improvement. The following questions will be asked during these exit interviews:

1. Why did you choose to become an American Studies major? What were your goals for pursuing this degree? What sorts of knowledge and skills did you hope to achieve?
2. As you graduate, what specific skills and knowledge do you think you have gained from completing the AS program?
3. How did you choose your courses for the American Studies program?
4. In choosing your courses, did you end up developing a particular focus or area of emphasis? If so, what was it, and how did you choose your courses to create this focus? If not, why didn't you establish an area of focus?
5. What gaps emerged as you completed your American Studies degree? Are there particular topics, areas, issues, disciplines that you wish you could have studied?
6. What were the biggest challenges of being an American Studies major, and what suggestions do you have to mitigate those challenges?
7. What was the biggest reward or benefit of being involved with the American Studies program?
8. What are your professional plans after graduation? Do you feel American Studies prepared you for that path? If so, how? If not, what would have helped to better prepare you for the job market or graduate school?
9. What suggestions do you have for building a stronger "American Studies" community among our current majors and minors?
10. What ideas or suggestions do you have for promoting the American Studies program and recruiting students to the program?

