

AMERICAN STUDIES ASSESSMENT 2023-24
UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

2023-24: INDIRECT MEASURES

In April 2024, **David Wall** conducted exit interviews with **one** graduating American Studies students (the other graduating senior did not respond to requests for an exit interview). Data from the exit interviews are recorded below.

1. How did you find out about the American Studies degree?

Parents both went to USU and so she had some familiarity with the university and available programs.

2. 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?

Her aunt was an American Studies major at BYU and so she came to USU with the intention of it being her major. She saw as very positive personal qualities of her aunt were built into the broad perspectives that American Studies can provide.

3. As you graduate, what specific skills and knowledge do you think you have gained from completing the AS program? What do you feel are the benefits of this program?

Perspective, connections, Museum of Idaho internship, the sense of such a wide range of jobs that American Studies can prepare you for, ie. in the areas on history, government, environment, academia, media etc – all good grounding for American Studies.

4. How did you choose your courses for the American Studies program?

Emily picked what sounded interesting to her – especially after getting to know the professors she was often drawn to them as individuals as well as being drawn to classes focused on her areas of interest (mostly anthropology and social sciences).

5. What was your area of focus? How did you choose this focus? Were you happy with the course offerings?

- **American Arts and Media —I was really interested in film and graphic design**
- **American Literature—love reading and writing**
- **American history—always a goal from the start. This focus attracted her to the AS program.**

6. Where did you do your internship? What was your experience like?

Museum of Idaho. Very positive – ‘fantastic’ – really convinced her to go into museum as a career

7. Did you have a minor? If so, what was it?

Linguistics.

8. What gaps emerged as you completed your American Studies degree? Are there particular topics, areas, issues, disciplines that you wish you could have studied?

Emily said that she didn't feel that there were any significant gaps in areas/options for study. She only wished that she had another 4 more years to go into everything in more depth.

9. What were the biggest challenges of being an American Studies major and what suggestions do you have to mitigate those challenges?

Primarily social. Emily loved doing the degree but says she had no real sense of broad social cohesion as part of an American Studies group/set. Taking classes in Poly Sci made her realise that all those students seemed to know each other. She would like to connect more with other folks.

10. 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?

Museum work and the degree has made that possible and confirmed all these things.

11. What suggestions do you have for improving the program and/or building a stronger "American Studies" community among our current majors and minors? Any suggestions for promoting the program or recruiting students?

**Have a clearer idea of what can be done with a American Studies major.
Let potential/interested students them know there are so many things it can help with.**

DATA-BASED DECISIONS

2023-24: Data-based decisions correlated to direct measures

Overall, this group of **two** American Studies graduates met the expectations for the learning objectives for the English dept. For each learning objective, the majority of the assignments met the "Exceptional" level of assessment, which is great news. Of the three objectives, the assignments were most successful in meeting Learning Objective #3, and we are pleased that American Studies students seem to be doing well with communicating ideas effectively in writing. American Studies students were least successful in meeting Learning Objective #2, which asks them to "Weigh alternative systems of thought or approaches, recognizing their assumptions and implications." In their comments on the rubrics, the committee noted that many of the assignments for American Studies come from disciplines outside of English, so some of these learning objectives are not always applicable to the assignments, which contributed to lower scores, particularly in the case of Learning Objective #2.

The American Studies assessment committee continues to express frustration and concern with using English dept. assessment objectives to evaluate American Studies courses, many of which are not designed to meet English dept. objectives. At present, the American Studies program does not find Objectives #1 and #2 very useful for evaluating American Studies assignments. The American Studies committee will discuss revising

their assessment objectives in Spring 25, in conjunction with consultation with the English dept. to see if the AS program needs to continue using English dept. criteria.

For now, based on this data, the faculty in the American Studies program are pleased to see that the majority of our graduates are meeting all three learning objectives in a satisfactory manner.

We would like to have more students meeting these learning objectives to an “Exceptional” degree. To this end, we will continue to remind all instructors of these learning objectives at the start of each semester and encourage them to develop and continue to manage their courses in ways that encourage students to accomplish those objectives. We will also continue to encourage AS faculty to use the Writing Fellows program for additional support to help students meet Learning Objective 3: Communicates ideas effectively in writing

Data-based decisions that rely on indirect measures

The response from the student interview for 2023-24 revealed the following four areas of focus, and we have developed specific plans for response to each area (see charts below).

1. Strengths of program
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The diversity of options for courses, topics, methods, disciplines, and perspectives available and opportunities to combine them in unique ways.- The focus on developing strong critical thinking skills in a range of contexts and disciplines- The flexibility of the program, which enables students to pursue topics and classes that suit individual interests.- Students play a central role in designing their degree program and taking responsibility for their academic choices and focus.- Many opportunities to develop good research skills and critical writing skills, along with opportunities for research projects- Excellent internship opportunities that students can tailor to their interests and career goals
In response to this feedback, we will...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Continue to ensure that we offer diverse courses, topics, methods, disciplines, and perspectives for students enrolled in the program- Continue to ensure that the program remains flexible and allows students freedom to design their own focus and choose their own courses.

- Continue to ensure that the program offers opportunities to develop research and writing skills.
- Find opportunities for students to share their internship experiences to help promote the program and the career opportunities it offers

2. Current Courses and Program Requirements (quality, accessibility, communication)

- Students are pleased with the diversity of the course offerings.
- We might look for ways to ensure students are better informed about course offerings each semester
- Students did not identify any major gaps in course offerings, but did note that, at times, courses they wanted to take did not fit their schedule.

In response to this feedback, we will...

- Continue to encourage students to develop a specific focus for their coursework through faculty advising and working closely with Maddie Thomas
- Continue to provide information listing available AS courses for each semester and find opportunities to distribute this information to students through information sessions, an email list, and/or website.
- Publicize minors and certificates and encourage American Studies students to take advantage of these opportunities.

3. Challenges within the program and ideas for improvement

Students identified challenges or gaps in relation to community

COMMUNITY

- Students would like to develop a stronger sense of community among current AS majors/minors.

In response to this feedback, we will...

COMMUNITY

- Develop an AMST course prefix to help make the program more visible and identifiable for AS majors/minors
- Hold an off-campus community event involving students and faculty
- We will work on planning one or two social events for AS majors/minors each semester
- Hold an “end of year” celebration event for graduating seniors, which may involve presentations of their capstone portfolio or alternative capstone reflection essays

4. Career plans and activities for AS majors, post-graduation

Museum studies/work

In response to this feedback, we will...

- Continue gathering information from alumni about current jobs/careers and make this career info available to students through our once-a-semester program info sessions.
- Draw on this specific job information in brochures, fliers, posters, and website to promote the program and recruit students, in conjunction with USU career-promotion initiatives
- Plan an event/speaker series that focuses on career options and institutionalize AS as a presence on campus (Matt Guterl)