

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review

Latin American Studies

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

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CAMPUS VISIT:

April 7-9, 2010.

The review team read the self-study written by the faculty in the department; reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; conducted class visits; interviewed faculty, students and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Deans and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, the department's self-study and other university materials.

1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the program – excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the program compare with benchmark top-tier programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee's rating.

- The reviewers rated the Latin American studies program as 'very good'.
- Furthermore, the review team believed that the potential exists for LAS to reach a level of excellence such that it becomes a model for LAS programs at other institutions and the University would be well served to promote LAS as a major flagship program.

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?

- The fact that LAS is a program not a department poses real constraints on its future development particularly in terms of its inability to function as a hiring unit, disparity in advising loads and having required courses that sacrifice depth for breadth due to staffing issues.
- The structural solutions to the current problems faced by LAS do not require significant additional resources.

3. What specific recommendations for improving the program's quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?

Administrative Support

- Course release for the program director on a par with that given to department chairs.
- Many LAS faculty have de facto joint appointments and the University may want to recognize this situation formally whereby the faculty's LAS and home department contributions are formally stipulated. Failing that, departmentalization should be considered.

- Formal recognition of LAS advising and service by home departments of active LAS faculty.
- Direct development office liaison between LAS and CELASA.
- Many of the immersion opportunities and service learning initiatives are “exemplary and are the envy of many colleges and universities”. But increasing financial aid will be needed for students unable to finance their immersion experience abroad.
- There should be a dedicated administrative assistant for LAS, CELASA and Chican@-Latin@ minor.

Faculty Resources

- In the short term, hire at least one Chican@-Latin@ scholar with focus on Chican@-Latin@ issues and with a specialization on migration, urban studies, border studies, community development or race and ethnicity.
- In the medium term, hire a Brazilianist with a focus in cultural studies, anthropology, or media studies, etc. that could possibly support the development of a Brazilian Studies minor in the future.

Curriculum

- The review team fully endorsed the curricular revisions outlined in the Latin American Studies Self-Study.
- In addition, the reviewers recommended that one or two theory and methods courses be developed as part of the required course sequence.
- The review team also felt that the program should increase the level of competency required in Spanish.
- There should also be a Chican@-Latin@ course requirement either as part of the required course or as an elective.

Structure

- The reviewers recommended formal implementation of the November 2009 by-laws in reference to the equitable distribution of faculty participation. This was particularly urgent given the increasing number of Latin American Studies majors and minors.
- It was recommended that the program assign a member of the Modern and Classical Languages faculty to the LAS Advisory Board as soon as possible.
- In future, the review team recommended that the LAS chair write a letter on service for all LAS faculty that could be used in personnel reviews.

4. In the opinion of the external review committee is the program following the University’s strategic initiative in that it is;

Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars.

- The review team noted that “the LAS faculty is dynamic, youthful and energetic. The older members are in the prime of their careers and the younger ones have embarked on trajectories that bode well for future success and recognition. There is no ‘dead wood’.”
- The faculty’s existing research strengths mark the group as “distinctive and exemplary” particularly in human rights, social justice and gender studies.
- The reviewers noted that this was a “high quality faculty by any standards and there is every reason to expect that future hires will maintain or even enhance its level of excellence.”

Enrolling, supporting and graduating a diverse student body that demonstrates high academic achievement, strong leadership capabilities, a concern for others, and a sense of responsibility for the weak and vulnerable.

- Students were engaged and committed and LAS pays close attention to learning outcomes in the major and minor as well as individual courses.

Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program.

- The review team noted that there was a “high level of collegiality and collaboration is exemplary”.
- The reviewers felt that this was not “a proto-department riven either by ideological and/or methodological factions or by personal antipathies and animosities” and its past and present leadership was highly praised and appreciated.

5. In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University of San Francisco a premier Jesuit, Catholic urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?

- The review team observed that “LAS’s activities fall squarely within the University’s mission to provide a high quality education with a focus on social justice and global citizenship.”
- The mission is clearly communicated in the LAS curriculum, in the teaching and service of the faculty, in the immersion experiences of the students and in co-curricular planning.

6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee’s recommendations for program improvement? What can the Office of the Provost do to appropriately respond to the review?

- Work with the program to set up a structure whereby the faculty’s LAS and home department contributions are stipulated and regularized either as joint appointments or as a potential move to becoming a separate department.
- Provide adequate course release for the program director.
- Work to ensure that all students have financial access to immersion programs.
- Work with the program on future faculty hires and administrative staffing levels.

7. What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewers report?

- The reviewers were “highly impressed” by the faculty and staff.
- The LAS program has the potential to become an exemplary one, a model for other LAS programs across the nation.
- The review team felt that there were structural solutions to LAS’s gravest problems and these solutions do not require significant additional resources.

