Streamlined Graduate Student Learning Outcomes Report
Department of American Studies (Jennifer L. Pierce, DGS)

A. Process:
We solicited input from all faculty, graduate students, and staff via email and two meetings (one American Studies Assembly meeting with grads and faculty on October 27th, two meetings with core American Studies faculty, and three meetings with the DGS and staff.) In addition, we solicited comments on the draft of this document from faculty, staff, and graduate students.

B. American Studies Graduate Student Outcomes

American Studies is a distinct interdisciplinary field that promotes a broad humanistic and social scientific understanding of American culture past and present. In its inception, it encouraged the study of American history, literature, and critical theory but in the past 40 years, it also includes areas as diverse as law, art, media studies, film, religious studies, urban studies, feminist studies, racial and ethnic studies, anthropology, sociology, foreign policy, and the culture of the United States. Our Ph.D. program has diversified the traditional curriculum by embracing the pluralist cultures to which America refers including for example, African American, Chicano, Latino, Native American, and Asian American perspectives in scholarly inquiry. In addition, we emphasize training in “transnational American Studies,” that is, an approach that problematizes that nation state as a distinct and isolated category considering instead the relationships between the U.S. and other countries in thinking through topics such as migration, imperialism, and war.

In pursuing interdisciplinary ways of knowing, American Studies seeks to integrate the newest developments in our field with those of other disciplines. One of the central tenets of American Studies is that complex questions about American history and American culture cannot be adequately addressed within established disciplinary boundaries. In training our graduate students, this means that they are expected to become familiar with scholarship in American Studies as well as that of another discipline(s) in their areas of study. In addition, they must become familiar with methodologies of more than one discipline (i.e., archival research, ethnography, oral history, interviewing, textual analysis, film analysis, and/or discourse analysis.) For all of our students, this means developing the tools to gather, evaluate, and interpret evidence and to communicate orally and in writing analysis to professional and public audiences. A Ph.D. in American Studies requires training in two specific subfields, methods, theory, language study, and original research. The original research at the core of American Studies dissertation requires that students discover and collect evidence from disparate sources the evidence that forms the basis of their argument. Taking into account the required coursework, language acquisition, and original research, we anticipate that our students will complete their degrees within six to seven years.
Graduate education in American Studies is distinguished from undergraduate education in its emphasis on self-direction. Though it includes a number of basic requirements (coursework in American Studies and related fields, language acquisition, written and oral Ph.D. preliminary exams, dissertation, and final defense), students emerge with the demonstrated ability to initiate and complete original research and other self-directed skills such as teaching, grant writing, and other engagement in their areas of specialization. The majority of our graduate students, though not all, pursue careers in the academy where self-direction is essential to their success. Graduate education also differs from undergraduate education in that it takes place in multiple locales beyond the classroom including one-on-one meetings with faculty, informal collaboration with other graduate students and faculty, formal workshops, professional conferences, service appointments, teaching, and self-directed research and writing.

Since 2004, 65 graduate students have received Ph.D.’s in American Studies. According to the 2010 NRC Report, American Studies has placed 73% of its Ph.D.s in academic positions. This compares well with competing programs (Harvard 69%; NYU 67%, and Yale 76%). From 2010 to December 2014, we placed 83 percent of our graduate students in the academy. Our graduate students are employed at top flagship public research universities, elite private universities, and leading liberal arts colleges. Among other institutions, our graduates hold tenure-track positions at University of Michigan, University of California Davis, University of Notre Dame, Smith College, Grinnell College, University of Massachusetts, University of Oregon, and University of Minnesota Duluth. Other Ph.D.’s are employed in the non-profit sector (for instance, state humanities commissions or curatorial positions at museums) and in academic publishing. In 2013, we had an outstanding job placement. Four graduates were placed in tenure-track jobs at Hampshire College, Earlham College, University of Hawai’i at Manoa, and SUNY College at Old Westbury. One graduate was awarded an ACLS New Faculty Fellowship at UC Davis, another received a Postdoctoral Fellowship at Rice University and two others accepted positions as the University of Pennsylvania’s Associate Director of Online Learning and Digital Engagement and Associate Director of the Newberry Library’s D’Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies.

Our graduate students have received doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships from the MacArthur Foundation, the Princeton University Society of Fellows, ACLS New Faculty Fellowship, the Ford Foundation, the Carter Woodson Fellows at the University of Virginia, and the Charles Eastman Fellowship at Dartmouth. In addition, four of our graduate students have received the Ralph Henry Gabriel Prize for the best dissertation in American Studies from the American Studies Association (in 1996, 1998, 2004, and 2014) and three have received the University of Minnesota’s Best Dissertation in the Arts & Humanities (in 2007, 2011, 2013). Other dissertation prizes awarded to recent graduates include the Latin American Studies Association Best Dissertation in Latino Studies Award (2009). American Studies graduates have also published influential books over the past decades, compiling an impressive list of prizes, including the Lora Romero First Book Prize,
American Studies Association; the Frederick Jackson Turner Prize, Organization of American Historians; and the Grace Abbott Book Prize of the Society for the History of Children and Youth. Finally, Tiya Miles (Ph.D. 2000), Professor of History at University of Michigan, was named a 2011 MacArthur Fellow.

It is most useful to compare our accomplishments in relation to other American Studies programs nationally. The graduate program in American Studies at the University of Minnesota has received high rankings in external evaluations. In the 2010 NRC Report, when all five categories are weighted as “equally important,” the program was ranked fifth in the nation with NYU, Washington State University, Yale, and Harvard preceding Minnesota. When compared with NYU, Yale, and Harvard (we do not compete for students with Washington State), we have favorable outcomes in time to degree, average completion rate, and placement. Moreover, in 2007, the Chronicle of Higher Education’s "Faculty Productivity Scholarly Index" for top research universities listed American Studies at Minnesota as second in the entire field.

We also measure our accomplishments in terms of diversity. In the past ten years, our graduate student body comprises 57% minority students, more than 5 times the average in CLA and the Graduate School. The current student population is 66 percent students of color and 52 percent female.

Program Assessment Outcome Measures

The program assessment outcome measures we have devised include: 1) Advanced Knowledge in American Studies; 2) Theory and Methods in American Studies; 3) Language Competency; 4) Original Research in American Studies; 4) Public and Professional Engagement; and 5) American Studies Pedagogy. In developing program assessment outcomes, we understand them as a range of possibilities for graduate training in our department. They are not intended to reduce students to points that are “ticked off” in boxes or to penalize them.

1) Advanced Knowledge in American Studies
This programmatic requirement includes: satisfactory completion of American Studies coursework and coursework in in other disciplinary fields (“interdisciplinarity”); one comparative culture course that focuses on a nation outside the U.S. (“transnational”); dissertation and PhD preliminary exam; committee members outside the field of American studies, the completion of PhD pre-liminary exams; graduate student teaching; and completion of dissertation and final defense.

Variations by student include: participation in the Institute for Advanced Studies, ICGC, and other disciplinary units through workshops and/or courses, graduate minors in other disciplinary fields; participation in national conferences in American Studies and other disciplines; and publication of book reviews,
encyclopedia entries, or synthetic essays; publication of research in academic journals; and placement.

2) Theory and Methods in American Studies
This programmatic requirement includes: satisfactory completion of American Studies Graduate coursework (AMST 8202) that focuses on theory and practice (e.g., Marxist theory, post-colonial theory, poststructuralism, feminist theory, and critical race theory); satisfactory completion of a graduate course in American Studies or another disciplinary unit that focuses explicitly on research methods; dissertation prospectus and successful completion of preliminary exams; and completion of dissertation and final defense.

Variations by student include: coursework in other disciplines that focus on theory; coursework in other disciplines that focus one methods; workshops in ICGC, IAS, or other disciplinary units; RAships; and GRPPs.

3) Language Competency
This Programmatic Requirement includes the successful completion of language (other than English) exam.

Variations by student include: competency required for research; use of non-English sources in research; work in non-English sites; participation in international conferences.

4) Original Research in American Studies
This programmatic requirement includes: successful completion of graduate coursework focused on research methods in American Studies or another discipline; dissertation prospectus; PhD preliminary exam; successful completion of dissertation and final defense.

Variations by student include: completion of an MA in American Studies; presenting research at national conferences; creating or participating in an exhibition; publications in scholarly journals or edited volumes; professional awards for conference papers, articles, or dissertations.

5) Public and Professional Engagement
This programmatic requirement includes: Dissertation seminar (AMST 8801); American Studies grant writing workshop; writing grant applications; practice job talks; presentations of research at national conferences; the development of a teaching portfolio (through AMST 8401).

Variations by student: publications in professional journals and edited volumes; public history and/or digital history projects (e.g., the Guantanamo Project); creating or participating in an Exhibition; lectures to the public or community; work in libraries, museums, or archives; and internships and other non-academic professional experience.
6) American Studies Pedagogy

This programmatic Requirement includes: a graduate course in American Studies that focuses explicitly on pedagogy (AMST 8401); working as a teaching assistant; teaching an undergraduate course in American Studies; completion of a preliminary exam (one of requirements specifies the completion of syllabus and rationale in one of their subfield areas); and teaching evaluations.

Variation by student: Faculty evaluations of teaching; multiple TA positions; multiple teaching opportunities at UMN and other institutions.

3. Structural Impediments to Graduate Student Learning Outcomes in American Studies

The significant decrease in the number of graduate students we are allowed to admit each year has a detrimental affect on cohorts. Ten years ago, we admitted 8-10 students a year, we are now restricted to four. The smaller cohort size makes it more difficult to create an intellectual community among students. It is also less attractive to prospective students to attend graduate school with such a tiny cohort. Given that our students not only garner tenure track jobs, but also obtain positions in prestigious museums, university presses, and other positions, it does not make sense to restrict the numbers of students admitted. If our program is to remain competitive, we need a larger cohort size.

TA and Fellowship stipend are too small, especially when compared to fellowship allocations at competing institutions (i.e., Yale, University of Michigan and NYU.) In terms of cost of living, Ann Arbor, Michigan is most similar to the Twin Cities, yet the University of Michigan stipend is much higher than ours. In addition, the University of Michigan provides summer funding for five years for every graduate student. We are losing top candidates to institutions with higher stipends. Increased stipend amounts and summer funding for five years would make our PhD program more competitive.