Undergraduate Degree Program

ABSTRACT

It’s not clear to us how the administration will be compiling assessment reports across departments for presentation to WASC. If the plan is to follow the 2002 format, however, we suggest the following entries for American Studies (AMST):

Table 7.1 (based on 2002 report prepared by Karl Kim’s office)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of activity</th>
<th>1999 forward</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population covered</td>
<td>Majors and minors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>All majors and minors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus of assessment</td>
<td>Student learning outcomes, departmental performance, departmental position within the AMST field.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data-gathering approach</td>
<td>Faculty meetings on each student at junior seminar midpoint, intake and exit student interviews, undergrad and grad student focus groups, capstone research and writing course, exhaustive internal and external review of the entire department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Found overall student enthusiasm about the program. Faculty sees room for improvement in student writing, research, and content knowledge. Positive external review, with suggestions for minor improvements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of results</td>
<td>Revamped undergraduate curriculum, new hires in key areas of student demand and emerging scholarship, creation of capstone course, teaching personnel changes, intensification of graduate and undergraduate advising</td>
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Table 7.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Voices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student &amp; course evals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews, focus groups, meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surveys (entry, midpoint, exit)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capstone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
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<tr>
<td>National or state exam</td>
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<td>Locally developed exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embedded assessments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alumni Voices</td>
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<tr>
<td>surveys, interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer Voices</td>
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<tr>
<td>surveys, interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty course review</td>
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<tr>
<td>updated courses based on assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>External Review</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

1. List in detail your SLOs for each undergraduate degree/certificate offered.

Upon completion of an AMST BA, all students should have acquired:

- Substantial knowledge of American history, society, and culture, as well as a basic appreciation of different scholarly approaches to American Studies
- Critical thinking skills necessary to analyze a variety of cultural artifacts (literature, primary documents, film, music, etc.), as well as historical and present-day sociopolitical issues.
- Competence in scholarly writing and oral communication
- Basic research skills, including advanced research skills in one area of specialization (majors only).

2. Where are these SLOs published?

SLOs are laid out on our website, undergraduate brochure, and handouts to prospective majors and minors (At this point we do not specifically use the “SLO” jargon, so if this is required, our publications will require modest revision). The undergraduate chair also conducts entry and exit interviews with every student, in which the department’s expectations and offerings (as well as the student’s experience) are discussed.

3. Explain how your SLOs map onto your curriculum?

AMST is an interdisciplinary program, so it introduces students to a variety of research methods, cultural forms, and content areas. As such, our curriculum strikes a balance between program integrity and consistency, on the one hand, and individual creativity, flexibility, and cross-departmental exploration on the other.

To encourage the latter, AMST allows students to take nine upper-division credits (out of thirty required for the major) outside of the department, subject to the approval of the undergraduate chair. A student particularly interested in U.S. women’s history, for instance, might supplement his AMST coursework with offerings in History, Women’s Studies, or Sociology.

To ensure the former, AMST offers a sequence of courses that provides all majors a shared set of skills and content knowledge in accordance with our SLO objectives. Our main introductory course, America & the World (AMST 150), surveys North American-world relations over 500 years, underscoring pivotal events in US history and highlighting the global dimension to the American experience. (Based on the recommendation of A&S advisors, as well as articulation concerns (AMST 150 is offered only at Manoa), this course is not currently required for majors and minors, though we encourage most students to take it, and most do). At the upper-division, we require all minors and majors to take a year-long junior seminar (AMST 381 & 382), which introduces students to diverse approaches to American Studies and surveys a variety of cultural artifacts in examining major turns in American history from the eighteenth century forward. As advanced seminars, AMST 381 and 382 require students to engage in critical discussions, make
oral presentations, and write regularly about the assigned readings, thus enhancing critical thinking, oral communication, and writing skills. Finally, all majors are required to complete our Senior Research Seminar (AMST 481), which requires students to conduct extensive primary research and write an original, analytically sophisticated, and polished research paper of approximately twenty-five pages. Working closely with the instructor, UH librarians, and one outside faculty advisor, students in AMST 481 substantially augment their research skills and develop considerable expertise in their area of specialization. Because multiple revisions are required, we have found that students’ prose improves considerably as well. AMST 481 is our capstone course and allows us to assess the SLOs of each graduating senior.

In addition to these required classes, AMST aims to advance our SLO objectives in all of our courses. As a complement to our two large lecture courses (AMST 150 and AMST 310), we emphasize seminars and medium-size courses to foster critical engagement rather than passive learning. In most of these courses, we require critical analysis of primary documents and secondary readings, and in many of our upper-division courses, we require individual research papers and oral presentations. At the lower division, we offer a variety of courses that emphasize basic concepts and content knowledge in US cultural studies, history, world, and political affairs. Ph.D. students teach some of these sections, and the undergraduate chair works closely with GAs and lecturers to ensure that SLOs are being advanced. Overall, the AMST curriculum committee has carefully analyzed all of our offerings over the past few years, making significant changes to eliminate overlap, enhance complementarity, harmonize expectations, and maintain consistency with theoretical developments in the humanities.

4. What specific methodologies were used to collect data?

Because AMST is a relatively small department (which means faculty members generally develop close mentoring relationships with each student) and an interdisciplinary program (which, by definition, means there is no single set of methods or content that must be mastered by all of its practitioners), we have developed a qualitative rather than quantitative assessment protocol. Our assessment program includes several components that allow us to evaluate both the progress of our students and the effectiveness of our teaching.

First, the undergraduate chair conducts an entry and exit interview with each major and minor, thus providing an opportunity to explore student experiences v. expectations, general attitudes toward the program, and any comments on our strengths and weaknesses. Over the course of these interviews, the undergraduate chair makes a note of patterns and instructive comments and shares them in a presentation to the entire faculty each spring. Likewise, during the spring and fall, the department chair shares any insights gleaned from reviewing student evaluations (both in the CAFE format and in our own customized forms).

Second, we have implemented a midpoint assessment check in the form of a meeting between the two instructors of our junior seminar (AMST 381 and 382). As each section (generally taught in the fall, then the spring) generally includes the same students, these instructors meet to discuss each student’s qualities at the end of the fall semester.
Finally, every graduating student in AMST 481 works intensively with the instructor and one outside advisor in crafting their capstone projects. This course concentrates all of our SLOs (save content mastery covered by previous courses), and thus allows us to carefully evaluate the writing, research, and critical thinking abilities of each student as she or he exits the program.

Because AMST bestows various awards to graduating seniors, the faculty awards committee also spends time scrutinizing the transcripts and selected written work of every graduating senior each spring. Because our modest size means that students and faculty members have worked together quite closely, these awards discussions tend to be quite substantive, thus providing an additional level of assessment.

In general, AMST faculty members assess the entire population of majors and minors in terms of performance, progress, and attitudes at three critical junctures in the program (entry, midpoint, and exit). We do not formally compile portfolios at this point (though we end up doing so for our best students for awards decisions and letters of recommendation for jobs and graduate school), but we are happy to consider doing so provided additional resources are made available.

5. How were the assessment data/results used to inform decisions concerning the curriculum and administration of the program?

Since WASC’s initial expression of concern about student assessment in 1999, AMST has made significant changes to nearly every aspect of our program. These changes have been based largely on our assessment of student learning and our students’ assessment of faculty teaching, as well as the scholarly direction of AMST nationally and the evolving UHM strategic plan. In terms of the curriculum, after reviewing the work of our students in 400-level seminars, we felt that our students were not acquiring sufficient content knowledge of American history (particularly in its global dimensions). Nor were we entirely satisfied with the quality of student research and writing. In response, we redesigned our core curriculum, creating a new introductory lecture course, AMST 150, and our intensive senior seminar, AMST 481. (We have also created an introductory writing course, AMST 110, but its fulfillment of the university writing requirement has thus far been blocked). Over a period of two years, between 2001 and 2003, the curriculum committee also reviewed every course offered by AMST, retooling syllabi, eliminating dormant or unpopular courses, and adding several new classes in emerging areas like performance studies, Filipino-American Studies, globalization, diasporic studies, and criminal justice. These curricular changes have made the AMST major more academically rigorous and have also installed checkpoints that make student assessment more systematic.

As AMST is currently expanding, hiring new faculty members and moving into new content areas, we have also made significant administrative and advising changes. Senior faculty members continue to guide key committees like hiring and personnel, but we have selected relatively new faculty members to serve as undergraduate and graduate chair, thus hoping to bring new energy and perspective to our teaching and advising. In the process of reworking our curriculum and attracting new students to the program, we have also made our undergraduate advising considerably more intense, extending our entry and exit interviews and encouraging all majors to meet with an advisor each academic year. In the process of designing a brochure and website (and also in preparing for our outside review), AMST also convened several focus
groups of undergraduates (as well as alumni and graduate students) to discuss the student experience in the program.

In terms of pedagogy, all faculty members have agreed to our stated SLOs and have endeavored to advance them in their courses. In addition, we have made personnel changes in certain required courses in response to student suggestions. Because some of our 200-level sections are taught by graduate students, we have also increased our supervision of these courses, carefully reviewing syllabi prior to instruction and meeting regularly with GAs and lecturers over the course of the semester. More so than in the past, we have been selecting our GAs and lecturers based not only on their scholarly excellence and financial aid needs but also on their effectiveness as an instructor.

6. General education assessment within the major

We believe that our SLOs and undergraduate teaching program fit perfectly within Manoa’s general education program. We believe that our emphasis on a personalized course of study, individual research, seminar classes, critical thinking, and writing and oral communication skills provides our students a more active learning community than some larger programs, which necessarily rely on more passive learning in the lecture format. The interdisciplinary reach of our program makes a one-size-fits-all quantitative assessment instrument exceedingly difficult to design. Nonetheless, our small size and assessment checkpoints allow us to keep close tabs on the progress and perspective of our students as they move through the program.
American Studies
Graduate Assessment

1. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

MA student acquire:
• Broad knowledge of U.S. history, society, and culture
• Understanding of several key disciplinary methods to U.S. history, society, and culture
• Critical analysis and writing skills
• Independent research skills involving primary sources

PhD students acquire:
• All of the above
• Broad knowledge of the history of American Studies as a field
• Mastery of two fields of the student’s specialization
• Pedagogical skills and experience for college-level teaching
• Advanced research skills necessary to complete a book-length project of original scholarship

2. SLOs are outlined in our departmental web page, which is in the process of being updated.

3.

• Broad knowledge of U.S. history, society, and culture—covered by the required seminars, AMST 600, 601, and 602
• Understanding of key disciplinary methods—covered in all of AMST seminars; the department also encourages students to take courses in related disciplines outside the department (e.g. English, history, political science, sociology, women’s studies, anthropology) in order to gain an in-depth training in each discipline.
• Critical analysis and writing skills—all graduate seminars require substantial amount of writing, for which professors provide critical feedback on both content and writing.
• Research skills—Many AMST seminars require a major research paper, and professors provide guidance on locating primary sources and treating them with proper analytical tools. Many students complete their degree with a Master’s thesis (Plan A).
• Broad knowledge of the history of American Studies as a field—As part of their qualifying exams, all PhD students are required to do a field in General American Studies, for which students design a syllabus for a two-semester, graduate-level course which covers general U.S. history, society, and culture and reflects the students’ understanding of, and perspective on, the state of the field. Students are examined on the readings on the syllabus during the oral examination.
• Mastery of two fields of specialization—As part of their qualifying exams, all PhD students are required to take written and oral exams in two fields of their choice. For each of these two fields, students compile a reading list of approximately 50 books that include both classics and the latest scholarship in the field.
Pedagogical skills and experience for college-level teaching—The department tries to distribute our Graduate Assistantships to as many PhD students as possible. Typically a GA starts as a section leader in a large lecture course taught by a professor, being responsible for leading weekly discussions, giving a guest lecture, and grading papers and exams. During their tenure as GAs, students work closely with the professor in designing lesson plans for section meetings, criteria for grading papers and exams, and presenting an effective lecture. Then the GA will be assigned to teaching a 200-level course of their own design, under the supervision of our faculty mentor. The faculty mentor closely reviews the syllabus and makes extensive suggestions on the readings, assignments, and the structure of the course. In the course of the semester, the faculty member visits the GA’s class to observe his/her effectiveness in the classroom and provides extensive feedback. In some cases, the GA then gets to teach a 300-level course of their own design, under the supervision of our faculty mentor. Again, the syllabus is closely reviewed by the faculty member and the curriculum committee, and once implemented, the faculty mentor supervises the teaching throughout the semester.

4. All items listed above, except the pedagogical skills and experience, apply to all graduate students in the department. The number of PhD students who get teaching experience depends on the number of GAships available in a given semester. The number is typically 4-6.

5. 
- Instructors teaching the required seminars (AMST 600, 601, 602) meet regularly to discuss course content and teaching methods so that there is continuity, coherence, and breadth among the three courses that all students take. The instructors also discuss the performance and progress of each student in the department.
- Every graduate seminar requires substantial amount of writing for which professors provide critical feedback. This gives the professors an occasion to assess the effectiveness of their teaching as well as monitor students’ analytical and writing skills.
- For the MA degree, students either write a Master’s thesis (Plan A) or take a written and oral exam which tests students’ mastery of the material covered in required seminars and in-depth knowledge of an area of their choice (Plan B).
- For the PhD degree, upon the completion of coursework, students take a Qualifying Exam comprised of written and oral examinations in three areas: General American Studies field and two fields of the student’s specialization. For the General American Studies field, students design a syllabus for a two-semester graduate-level course which covers general U.S. history, society, and culture and reflects the students’ understanding of, and perspective on, the state of the field. For each of the two specialized fields, students compile a reading list of approximately 50 books in the field. The written segment of the exam is a take-home exam done in a 96-hour period. Upon the successful completion of the written exam, students take a 3-hour oral exam covering all three fields.
- All students writing theses and dissertations receive critical feedback from their committee members during the process of researching and writing. Once the committee agrees that the student is ready to defend the thesis/dissertation, the student takes an oral defense where he/she responds to questions and critical comments from the committee members. At the end of each academic year, the department faculty discusses the assessment of all dissertations.
submitted that year, and recommends up to two dissertations for the Ralph Gabriel Award (for the best dissertation in American Studies) given by the American Studies Association.

- In the Fall of 2003, the department conducted an external review, which provided an occasion for the faculty to assess the curriculum and teaching effectiveness and to gain professional evaluation by experts in the field.

6.

- Our graduate students regularly present their work at professional conferences such as the American Studies Association, Association for Asian American Studies, Organization for American Historians, etc. The number of students presenting at professional conferences varies from year to year; on average, it is about 5-10 per year.

- Our graduate students have published articles in refereed journals. Some of our graduates have published, or are in the process of publishing, books based on their dissertations from university presses such as Routledge, Wesleyan University Press, Temple University Press and UH Press. The number of such publications varies from year to year.

7. The department tries to maintain contact with all of our graduates to monitor their employment, publication, and other professional activities. Some of our graduates’ achievements are listed on our departmental web page.