

February 1, 2018

**PROFESSOR SCOTT DESPOSATO, Director**  
**Latin American Studies Program**

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Program Review for the Latin American Studies Program

Dear Professor Desposato,

The Undergraduate Council discussed the Latin American Studies 2017 Undergraduate Program Review. The Council supports the findings and recommendations of the review subcommittee and appreciates the thoughtful and proactive response from the Program. The Council's comments centered on the following:

**Growth of the Program.** The Council is encouraged by the recent change in leadership of the Program, as having one dedicated Director will allow the Program to concentrate efforts on growth of the Program. We look forward hearing about the initial offering of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) course, and the effects it had on enrollments and student interest in the major. We also look forward to hearing about the progress of implementing the internship program and the establishment of areas of concentrations within the Latin American Studies major.

The Council will conduct its follow-up review of the Department in Winter 2019. At that time, our goal is to learn about the Program's progress in implementing the recommendations of the program review subcommittee and the Undergraduate Council. The Council extends its thanks to the Program for their engagement in this process and we look forward to the continued discussion.

Sincerely,

Sam Rickless, Chair  
Undergraduate Council

Attachment

(1) Undergraduate Program Review Report and Responses for Latin American Studies

cc: F. Ackerman  
J. Eggers  
R. Horwitz  
J. Moore  
C. Padden  
R. Rodriguez  
M. Sidney

## **UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM REVIEW**

### **Latin American Studies Program**

Professor Ursula Meyer and Program Review Chair, UC  
San Diego Professor Todd Henry, UC San Diego  
Professor Gerardo Aldana, UC Santa Barbara

The Committee met on Monday, May 23, 2017 with the new program director Scott Despasado, affiliated Senate faculty, AVCDUE Sawrey, representation from the student body, the Divisional Dean, the Undergraduate Advisor and Business Officer, representation from the Teaching Assistants, and the Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Education. The committee had been provided with the self-study, a past review and a set of documents providing data for the program past and present.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE CURRENT PROGRAM:**

As per the self study, the current program offers interdisciplinary undergraduate, major, minor, and graduate masters' degrees. The program has no permanent faculty of lecturers. In the current General Catalog are listed 87 professors housed in 17 disciplines: 7 in Ethnic Studies, 3 in Linguistics, 14 in Literature, 9 in Anthropology, 4 in Family Medicine, 7 in Political Science, 7 in International Relations, 6 in Visual Arts, 6 in Sociology, 5 in Communication, 9 in History, 1 in Chemistry and Biochemistry, 2 in Economics, 1 in Cognitive Science, 1 in Psychiatry, 2 in Urban Studies, and 3 in Pediatrics. There is a faculty director and half-time staff person, with MSO support from Sociology.

As of the Spring of 2017, there were 8 majors, 3 minors, and 8 graduate students. This is a little more than half the majors the department had in the Spring of 2012 and less than half the minors. To satisfactorily complete the BA, students must complete 52 credit units taking a broad range of courses selected from UC San Diego's Humanities and Social Sciences departments. All students entering the major must enroll in a lower division interdisciplinary course that serves as a foundation for a core sequence of three upper division courses focusing on Latin American history, society, politics and culture. Electives give the students an opportunity to acquire research skills and pursue their interests in specific sub-regions, countries, and areas of study. In the senior year, students in the major are required to take a capstone research seminar in which they write a research paper. Also, as part of the overall requirements, students must demonstrate a proficiency in Spanish or Portuguese. The minor consists of 26 credit units that allow students to explore interdisciplinary approaches to the study of an important region of the world while pursuing a major in an academic discipline.

Students are encouraged to participate in the EAP in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica or Mexico or in other Opportunities Abroad Programs. Also, there is a partnership with the Academic Internship Program that offers opportunities for practical learning through internships in community settings, nongovernmental agencies, government agencies, and business with activities related to Latin America, immigration or Latino/a groups in the United States. Majors can also participate in the MMFRP (Mexican Migration Field Research Program), an in-depth, hands-on research experience in Mexico or the United States.

In the current catalog, there are 16 courses under the Latin American Studies section – 7 designated for graduate students only. There are elective courses in 15 other disciplines that can serve the undergraduate major. 18 in Anthropology, 2 in Critical Gender Studies, 5 in Communication, 1 in Education Studies, 3 in Economics, 21 in Ethnic Studies, 31 in History, 47 in Literature, 1 in Music, 9 in Political Science, 6 in Sociology, 11 in Theatre and Dance, 1 in Urban Studies and Planning, 10 in Visual Arts, and 13 Methods courses in various departments.

The program is housed in the Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies, however it does not operate under the aegis of CILAS. The program, both graduate and undergraduate, is now under the direction of Scott Desposato, Associate Professor in Political Science.

## STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES:

### **Strengths:**

As Professor Desposato writes, “The program is serving students in exactly the way it was designed to – offering students the opportunity to leverage the wide-ranging expertise at UCSD into focused study on topics they are passionate about. Graduating seniors this year include a pre-med student studying HIV treatment policy in Tijuana, a future entrepreneur interested in university incubators and business creation, and a student examining gender in Mexico through the legends of historic women.” The program director feels that this would not have been possible in any existing program on campus.

Since the last review, LAS followed the advice of the previous review and added a special topics course on Latin America designed to enhance the common theoretical and substantive background for majors and minors in order to increase their interaction and exchange.

As an interdisciplinary program, LAS offers students a chance to earn credit in a tremendous variety of courses and topics. Students report no difficulty in enrolling in approved courses and are fulfilling their graduate requirements without difficulty.

Professor Desposato feels, “The unit’s instructional program has a disproportionately high impact on students and the community. “Although they only offer a few courses within the program, these courses are often “life-changing” for the students. He also points out that the foundation course, LATI 50, makes an important contribution to the campus and broader community providing a broad overview of Latin American politics, history, society, and culture and fulfills degree requirements for some colleges. Given our proximity to Latin America and as Professor Desposato writes, “the widespread ignorance about that region “the class has become an important source of learning for the students and the community. Finally, the Field Research class for Migration Studies provides students with a unique exposure to fieldwork practices, ethics, and techniques of problem solving. Also, their participation provides important data on Mexican migrants to the U.S. Unlike similar LAS programs at UCSB and UCSC, this exposure to research methods gives students an added level of preparation for graduate work. LAS provides a lot of classes that push back against the metric. It is a lot more than its majors.

Affiliated faculty offered other positive observations. “There is great value in broad area studies – to broaden language studies. You can’t learn Spanish without understanding the culture.” Many students who do not want to major in LAS have a connection to the area. Affiliated faculty are very dedicated to their LAS classes. They feel that people are “hungry for it”. They assert that students drive down from other campuses for seminars. Faculty commented that “Area Studies” within modern scholarship has waned, but that Latin American Studies at UCSD does not follow that traditional model. The LAS Program is built with a flexibility that allows it to range across disciplines and also to provide interdisciplinary frameworks for study.

Student response to the program was very strong. It was expressed that, particularly as a double major, it has a greater value than International Studies because the program not only addresses the economic and political aspects of the area, but the cultural aspects and the people themselves. It has a local vs. global perspective. It is a “qualitative “rather than a “quantitative” exploration. The feeling seemed to be that there is a vibrant community of prospective students waiting to be tapped.

The recently hired SAO is reportedly extremely available and accessible to all the students. She is able to schedule individual appointments to discuss their degree progression and students are given access to the Virtual Advising Center where they can pose questions any time of day or night. Considering how many courses are available as part of this major, it is impressive that current students have not reported difficulties.

### **Weaknesses:**

The primary concern is number of majors and minors. Even though it has declined considerably in the last five years, the number of majors has been small for some time – 14 in 2011, 8 in the Spring of 2017. The number of minors has also declined but the number has been at about 3 students for the last several years. We believe there is a

strong argument to be made that this is largely a result of two factors. For one, the major is very flexible, which provides great opportunities, but requires significant guidance and/or intervention. Complicating this aspect of the program is that it has lacked committed and enthusiastic leadership for some time now. It is our understanding that a failed recruitment of a director left the position open until it was taken by a retired faculty member. While that was certainly laudable, it did not facilitate the transition of the program to keep up with scholarly change or to chart out a visionary future. Such a lack of concerted leadership for a major that requires significant undergraduate advising makes the current state of low majors and minors to a degree unsurprising. At this evaluation, the new program director has just begun his work with Latin American studies, we feel it is premature to attempt a characterization of any of his work as weakness at this point.

The committee would like to point out that some recruitment ideas that came out of the last review were never addressed. It is a fairly well established belief that the number of majors is significantly related to the lack of awareness about the program. Until this year, however, it appears that very little recruitment has been done—on campus or at local community colleges. In terms of general visibility, there appears to be a strong designated core faculty active within and supportive of the major, but their contact information and a discussion of their research isn't highlighted on the program website. Neither is there significant visibility of graduate student research. In fact, we feel that the entire website fails to really promote what can be done with the major and what are the advantageous of Latin American Studies as opposed to, for example, International Relations.

Another area of concern to the evaluation committee was that LAS affiliated faculty expressed feeling that they were not reinforced for building new classes because the results are not immediately perceived. Several affiliated faculty noted that it was time to really overhaul and reinvent area studies.

Finally, the previous review mentioned the student's need for better, more thorough advising since the strength AND weakness of this program is its huge number of class offerings and students can become overwhelmed. The students love the diversity, but can get lost.

The SAO serves both the undergraduate and graduate students and is staffed only part time (20 hours a week). Finally, in response to the TTD difficulties for transfer students because of the upper division language requirements and course work that is not available in community college, the program has committed to a renewed focus on transfer students and helping them get to their degrees in the same amount of time as their four-year counterparts.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

As is noted above, some of what we recommend is simply that the new director be given sufficient time and staff to incorporate some of their new ideas in promoting the program and increasing majors. We understand that there have been some great advances in the graduate area and the director would like to apply some of what he has learned working with the graduates to the undergraduate areas.

The new program director has started to reach out with these suggestions. Increased efforts to recruit new students has been their main focus. Already this past year, there have been two on-campus recruitment events and one on-campus social science research conference. The MMFRP program was highlighted and research of current students was discussed. There was a booth present at Triton Day, allowing the SAO to meet and greet three Freshman who have already declared an LAS major. It also provided an opportunity for the SAO to talk to many students and their parents who were undeclared or contemplating a double major or a minor in LAS. At the point of this review, they were also planning to contact a similar group of students on Transfer Admit Day in late May. They are planning a visit to the community colleges and a variety of information 'fairs' around the county. Finally, they have increased their contact with the undergraduate colleges on campus to network with their advisors so that they can direct interested students to LAS. Also, the perceived weakness of LAS majors and minors feeling isolated was to host a monthly seminar and meeting for all majors, minors, and graduate students in the discipline. The first seminar was in January. We find all of this to indicate the strong potential of the program to increase majors and minors.

On a more concrete level, the committee recommends several things. In terms of general visibility, we feel that the face of their program – at least the designated core faculty for any given year should be part of a website with contact information and a discussion of their research. We also suggest that graduate research could be on the website. In fact, we suggest revamping the entire website to really promote what can be done with the major and what are the advantages of Latin American Studies as opposed to International Relations – why those missions are different. We recommend that there be more examples of pathways to graduation to help students navigate possible concentrations in the major and give incoming students examples of specific “tracks”, even laying out successful models from graduates. The staff and director seemed receptive to these suggestions as they came up in our discussions. In terms of the curriculum, we wondered if there need to be more upper and lower division requirements with the Latin American Designation.

We particularly want to encourage community college outreach and suggest that faculty recruiters take their majors with them to provide peer perspectives. The committee suggests laying out a clear outline of what one can do with this major, careers as well as graduate study opportunities. We suggest highlighting the skill oriented use of the major. We recommend that the outline be shared with community colleges and Freshman orientation classes.

We concur with the suggestion that there be a second LATI 50 as that is the class with the largest enrollment and not offered enough. We wondered if LAS needs a new home separate from CILAS since they feel that their missions are very different. This particular ambiguity came up several times during the day. We felt that perhaps there needs to be some kind of joint meeting where these discrepancies are ironed out or clarified. We still wondered if there should be a discussion about combining LAS and CILAS as a number of faculty suggested, or at least allow the advisory committee that serves CILAS to aid LAS. This could be as simple as a combined student lunch or a connection with the graduate program – which does collaborate at present. It was suggested that there be a colloquium – a two credit course/seminar for masters students to present their research or to bring in speakers. Another recommendation was that the senior research project be a two-quarter sequence with possible advisors from other areas.

We learned that, as of July 1, departments will have some flexibility to request funds from the Division’s block grant to hire Temporary faculty, since there has been no Temp FTE money in the past. We also concur with the recommendation that the Staff position be increased to 75% .

We recognize there may well be other reasons that this vibrant major has so few students – perhaps there could be more studies as to why this is happening, as well as support for the recruitment efforts that are being implemented. It was suggested that there be a collective brainstorm – that linguistics, literature, chicano studies, ethnic studies, be part of a dialog on area studies and how things have shifted. The notion was brought forward that perhaps admission policies are affecting the social sciences, favoring the international and computational lines of study.

We wondered if there could be more interface with groups such as Chicano/Latino studies – perhaps some kind of hub or community home on campus. Even if there are different philosophical views, the programs, we feel, should be working together in some way. In response to the students who say they ‘stumbled upon the major’ and are excited and happy now that they have found it but still feel isolated, we wondered if there was a way to reach out to language students in other areas (Chinese Studies , Russian Studies ) to create a larger community of research into a variety of global challenges.

We wondered if the language requirement discourages students from minoring. We noted that Korean studies makes the language requirement for minors optional. We recommended continuing to publicize this exciting program through social media – web pages, facebook pages, etc., reaching out to the RASTA center, updating the catalog to interface with faculty who are teaching DEI classes. We also suggest finding out what students are in study abroad programs in Latin America and reaching out to them as potential majors or minors. We suggest celebrating the students such as the ones the director mentions in the first paragraph above and those we interviewed and making their palpable passion central to orientation events and as advocates for the program out in the world.

## **CONCLUSION:**

We acknowledge that leadership turnover has damaged the program and there may well have been a benign neglect of the program. We recognize and admire the clarity and passion with which Professor Despasatos speaks about the program and its importance to the university and to the general fields of learning and education in our global arena. We are encouraged by the enthusiasm and respect that the Program Director has for the new advisor who is now focused only on Latin American Studies. We noted that the interim staff was split between Public Health and LAS. The committee was in agreement with the director and enthusiastic student input as well as that of the affiliated faculty in supporting the need for a concentrated major or minor or double major in this area. We concur with their notion that it is not only beneficial to our campus, but a much needed area of study in our mission of creating whole citizens that can truly serve the global community. And given the proximity to Latin America and the topics of immigration reform and multiculturalism in twenty-first century North America and the world, we must encourage and support curiosity about the broader history of these complex issues and the deep exploration of the world views that this major has to offer. Overall we found that there is tremendous faculty support for the continuation of the program—actually stronger and significantly more in number than comparable programs at peer institutions. This energy and enthusiasm is critical to a successful program and bodes well for LAS if the new director is given the support to implement his new vision adapted to integrate the findings of this evaluation.

Sincerely,

Professor Ursula Meyer and Program Review Chair, UC  
San Diego Professor Todd Henry, UC San Diego  
Professor Gerardo Aldana, UC Santa Barbara