

July 8, 2018

PROFESSOR BABAK RAHIMI, Director
Third World Studies Program

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Program Review for the Third World Studies Program

Dear Professor Rahimi,

The Undergraduate Council discussed the Third World Studies 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 will conduct its follow-up review of the Program in Spring Quarter 2020. At that time, our goal is to learn about the results of the discussion to 1) rename the Program and 2) reaffirm the intellectual and educational mission of the Program. The Council extends its thanks to the Program for their engagement in this process and we look forward to the continued discussion.

Sincerely,

Anthony Burr, Chair
Undergraduate Council

Attachment

(1) Undergraduate Program Review Report and Response from Third World Studies

cc: M. Corr
C. Della Coletta
R. Horwitz
J. Moore
R. Rodriguez
M. Sidney

Undergraduate Program Review: Third World Studies

March 4, 2019

Program Review Committee

- Ranjit Jhala (Chair), UCSD, Computer Science & Engg.
- Luis Martin-Cabrera, UCSD, Literature
- Juan Poblete, UC-Santa Cruz, Literature

Overview

The Third World Studies Program (TWS) was started in 1970, as an independent program funded by the (then new) Third College. Currently, the program comprises several affiliate faculty from the Department of Literature. The program comprises a robust sequence of lower-division courses that form part of an undergraduate minor and major. The goal of TWS is, to quote the program's website, to "provide understanding of the changing economies and politics of the Third World and its relationships to the West." That is, the courses emphasize the "historical inequitable relationships between the United States and Latin America, Africa and Asia" and connect a regional focus with a broader global perspective that "uncovers the socio- economic and cultural complexity of inequalities on a broad scale, especially in light of major economic and political changes worldwide since the 1980s."

The goal of this review is to assess the health of the program: specifically, to determine its unique strengths, identify aspects that need reinforcement and, in consultation with all the participants: faculty, staff, students and the the broader UCSD community, suggest concrete steps for improvement.

Strengths

TWS is a truly unique program, with many strengths that make it especially valuable to UCSD. First, the program is one of the vanishingly few that was imagined as and continues to present students with a deep *critique* of capitalism, providing a platform for many *regional voices* articulating alternative ideas of being.

Second, the program presents a broad, *interdisciplinary* perspective on the issue of *inequality* in a global Context, while focusing on some of its many facets, not just economic and macro-political, but also from a "bottom up" or "grassroots" level social and cultural perspective.

Third, under the TWS rubric, the diverse regions are studied from the perspective of *community based* service learning. The classes include projects on community organization and students study activist history in a region, with a view towards understanding how social transformation happens in the "South". Over the last few years, TWS has sponsored a variety of events on campus, that have help to catalyze the growth of this community.

Fourth, the students and faculty *in* the program are extremely *passionate* and engaged with the program and its unique mission. The classes contain a very diverse set of students across a variety of specializations. We were especially pleased to hear the students' describe their classmates as generally

“leaning into” discussions during class. This breadth of participation and perspective is increasingly rare in our age of (over-)specialization, and makes the classes attractive to both students and faculty.

Finally, the consolidation of the TWS program within the Institute of Arts and Humanities (IAH) has been very beneficial in that it has addressed problems with regards to access to administrative resources, and, looking ahead, opened up several ways to connect with students and faculty from related and like minded programs.

Opportunities for Improvement

At the same time, the review found that the health of the TWS program could be improved in various ways.

Due to some unclear confluence of national trends and local conditions, 2015 saw an steep drop in enrollments. Happily, the numbers quickly bounced upwards and while not yet at the high-levels enjoyed around 2013, are quite healthy and stable.

Perhaps of greater concern, is that several faculty who teach the TWS sequence have already or are about to retire. This places the burden of teaching the sequence on a smaller set of shoulders. We are heartened that, under the stewardship of the current director there is a core group of faculty teaching the classes that remains passionately committed to the program and its mission. Nevertheless, there are several *structural barriers* that hinder the recruitment of faculty across departments, and these must be systematically addressed to invigorate the program.

Most importantly, perhaps both of the above are symptoms of a deeper problem: the *name* of the program carries a lot of historical “baggage” that obfuscates the *intellectual mission* of the program. Students, faculty and staff agreed that the name made it difficult to explain what the program was *about*, as it harkened back to an earlier age with intimations of the cold-war and the non-aligned movement which are perhaps, less relevant in the year 2019. That is, the term “third world” made the mission and focus of the program *less legible* to the public, obscuring its strengths and reducing it to issues around political economy and policy, instead of highlighting the central theme of the program, namely, an interdisciplinary perspective on *inequality in a global context* which is, extremely and increasingly relevant today.

All the stakeholders agreed that by occluding the intellectual core the name “third world” made it difficult to recruit new students to the classes (beyond a devoted core that were already deeply invested e.g. in these topics) and to recruit faculty from other departments or programs (e.g. Sociology, Environmental Studies, or Anthropology) whose participation could revitalize the program.

Recommendations

Consequently, we make the following recommendations to the TWS program. First, identify a name that clearly illuminates and makes more legible the strengths of the program, namely its broad, holistic and interdisciplinary focus on inequality in a global context. Next, use this renewed focus as the starting point of a series of steps to broaden participation in the TWS program to faculty from other disciplines. Concurrently, undertake initiatives to make the program more attractive to the undergraduate body at large.

Clarify Intellectual Mission

A recurring motif of the review was that the name “third world studies” did not properly emphasize the intellectual and educational mission of the program. While the term “third world” is recognizable, it can, unfortunately be somewhat misleading and require *more* explanation about what the program really is about.

In contrast, the committee felt that the faculty and the self-review made a compelling case that the focus of the program was to *inequality* in a global context. Thus, terms like “global south”, or “culture and inequality around the world” or similar terms from the language of inequality that could emphasize the breadth and complexity of the forms of inequality – natural, cultural, social – that are actually studied by the program, would provide a perfect bridge to an enhanced vision that is more attractive to contemporary students and faculty.

Workshop

The main challenge that must be addressed is to ensure that in the process of clarifying and broadening the mission, the program is still able to hold onto the elements and perspective that are its unique strengths. One concrete step would be to convene a day-long workshop or mini-conference with five to ten faculty, including those who currently teach TWS classes, those who may potentially teach such classes in the future, and kindred colleagues from other universities to discuss how to preserve the strengths and core mission of the program while branching out. Such a workshop would have several goals and benefits.

First, it would help widen the *community* of potential faculty, and help identify new members, and understand what kinds of incentives could recruit new faculty to the program.

Second, it would identify ways to make TWS more attractive as a *teaching* medium, reaching out beyond current undergraduates.

Third, and most importantly, the workshop could expansively explore how the notion of *inequality* looks from different points of view. This will help to update the TWS mission with an updated articulation that connects the original idea with current concerns including transnational aspects that have become pressing due to globalization and climate change e.g. unequal environmental consequences of resource extraction, migration, expulsion of populations, diaspora, and accounting for the presence of the “third” world in the “first”. Consequently, the workshop would help deepen the *interdisciplinarity* of the program, by identifying how faculty in sociology, anthropology, political science, environmental studies etc. could expand and strengthen the program beyond the current focus on cultural production.

Faculty Participation

We were very happy to see that despite many recent changes, there is an extremely passionate group of faculty who are committed to the mission of the program. However, as also identified in the previous review, TWS would benefit from broader participation, to deepen the interdisciplinarity, perhaps be more attractive to a wider class of students, and, on a more mundane level, to alleviate the heavy load currently being carried by a few shoulders. The issue has become more pressing since the last review as several core faculty have retired.

Over the last few years, the director has had some success recruiting new faculty to teach TWS course, but their efforts have also identified several *structural barriers* towards incentivizing broader participation from faculty (within and without the department of Literature.)

The first of these barriers is perhaps the name, and lack of clarity around the intellectual mission. We hope this problem can be addressed by the workshop which would outline ways in which faculty in other departments could participate in the program in a way that would spread the load of teaching the classes and sustaining the program and deepen its interdisciplinarity without diluting its principles.

The second, but bigger issue is the absence of a global strategy for incentivizing interdisciplinarity. Specifically, there are several real or perceived *disincentives* that make it hard to recruit faculty to teach TWS classes, all of which boil down to the fact that the faculty’s “home” department (e.g. Literature) does not get any “credit” when the faculty teaches a TWS class. The enrollments of the class count towards TWS (and not the home department), which, in turn hurts the home department when it comes to the allocation of resources that are based on enrollment, e.g. course loads, faculty lines and so on.

Consequently, many faculty (and their department chairs) believe that to be good departmental citizens, it is better to teach, say, a 20 person course listed under Literature, than a 120 person interdisciplinary TWS course (especially, given that more focused intra-disciplinary classes receive stronger student evaluations.)

While it was unclear whether this connection between enrollments and allocation was real in the case of TWS, it is definitely *perceived* as such by both faculty and department chairs. Such real or perceived disincentives fly in the face of UCSD's institutional priorities. Hence, we recommend several concrete steps that could be undertaken as part of a global strategy for facilitating interdisciplinarity.

1. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies assured us he would determine if and how exactly enrollments were connected to resource allocation, so that faculty and their chairs could get a clear idea about whether there are resource related ramifications of teaching interdisciplinary classes like those in the TWS program.
2. Perhaps it is possible to *remove the disincentives* by identifying how enrollments could be *shared* by both the home department and TWS. For example, a formula where some fraction of the enrollment counted towards TWS, and the rest to the home department would allow both to benefit (e.g. when a Literature faculty taught a 120 person TWS class instead of a 20 person LIT class).
3. Another possibility would be buy-out departmental faculty so that their home department could, with those funds, hire lecturers to teach replacement or alternative classes.
4. Finally, and as importantly, it would be possible and relatively inexpensive to *create incentives* for faculty who teach interdisciplinary classes. For example, by allocating a research stipend to the faculty who teach for TWS. Several participants agreed that even a modest amount of \$1000-\$1500 would go a long way to incentivize broader participation from faculty currently not involved with TWS. Perhaps there is already some fund allocated to the IAH that could be used for this purpose, or if not, we recommend that it may be prudent and strategic to create such a fund as a little money would go a long way towards aligning the incentives of individual faculty with the priorities of the institution.

Student Participation

As shown by the student evaluations and our interview, on the whole, the students enrolling the TWS classes are very enthusiastic about the goals and faculty of the program. However, the committee identified several ways in which the engagements with students could be and strengthened to make the program thrive.

Foremost, we believe that clarifying the mission (as described above), will make the program more appealing to undergraduates. First, it will help students get a clear idea of what future careers the program would *prepare* them for, e.g. NGOs, think tanks, education, or even more broadly, public health. A recentered focus around inequality could also make the program appealing as a minor to students majoring in other e.g. focusing on the environment or engineering or the sciences where issues around civic engagement and inequality are increasingly pressing.

The TWS major itself relies on upper-division courses taught outside the TWS program. Students expressed difficulty with selecting classes as this list is often not up-to-date. This suggests the list of classes should be refreshed, streamlined and updated. Additionally, students requesting specific course approval for the major should be given a clear timeline of approval of their request. Further, once the mission is clarified and the program updates the catalogue appropriately, it should also highlight the engaging non-textual elements that add media, dimensions, and objects of study to TWS classes.

The appeal of a TWS program could be greatly increased by the addition of a *study abroad* component, or participation in the *global seminars* program which could give students experience with social work and activist groups abroad. Of course, these cannot be requirements as the travel costs can prove exclusionary, and can impact the time to graduation. This issue could be mitigated by partnering with

the new *Seventh college* whose theme is “changing climate” and which will require students undertake an interdisciplinary capstone project on topics around environmental, social and economic equality that resonate with the mission of TWS. The college already has funding for a limited number of study abroad grants that could be used to support travel costs. Another approach would be to systematically incorporate *internships* for example with *local* civic groups or NGOs that wish to carry out community based projects. The IAH has (currently underutilized) funds to support such internships, which again, resonate with the aims of the TWS program. Students who participate in either the study abroad or internships would then be the ideal *ambassadors* for the TWS program, helping explain its rationale and increase its enrollments in the future.

Students and faculty both remarked upon the difficulty of finding suitable *teaching assistants* (TAs) for TWS classes. This is a relatively recent phenomenon, as previously, TAs for these courses were highly sought after. However, faculty now often have to scramble to find TAs from other departments whose students are not always sufficiently expert in the subject matter. The root cause for this symptom is murky, and could be the combination of several factors ranging from the change in TA contracts to faculty personnel to the move to IAH from Literature. While not urgent, we recommend the faculty keep an eye on this problem (e.g. by interviewing potential TAs) in case matters deteriorate.

Finally, one possible alternative approach the review committee considered may be to focus, for a given limited time, on the core strength of the program, namely the lower-division TWS sequence, by temporarily capping the major at zero, until the other steps have increased the demand to warrant a major. This would allow targeting administrative and teaching resources to where needed, and would set realistic expectations for the program in the interim period until more students and faculty are brought into the program. When this happy point is reached, i.e. once there are faculty outside of literature, the program could restore the major and additional or alternately create multiple *tracks* with a specialized focus (e.g. anthropology, sociology, literature) much like the *International Studies* major has a specialization in literature, which would be a natural outcome of a future interdisciplinary expansion.

Conclusions

In summary, the review found that the venerable TWS program has rebounded from a steep drop circa 2015, and stabilized over the last few years, due to the efforts of its director, the consolidation of administrative support owing to the move to the IAH, and ultimately the enthusiasm of the faculty and students participating in the program.

However, we have made several suggestions on how to update the program’s mission, to sustain and enlarge its vision in the 21st century. In this regard, we recommend studying related programs like Berkeley’s “Global South: Poverty and Practice” which has proven to be very successful owing to its interdisciplinary breadth, focus on study-abroad initiatives and outreach.

We recommend TWS should proceed one step at a time, starting with the issues of clarifying its mission and finding incentives to recruit new faculty, which will pave the way towards longer term goals like interdisciplinary expansion.

We thank the TWS director and faculty as well as the divisional staff for making our task and report possible.