

Latin American and Latino Studies Program
Academic Assessment Report – 2020
Prepared and Submitted by
Yajaira M. Padilla, Director of LALS

The following points address LALS co-majors' and minors' learning outcomes as evaluated by the LALS program's faculty and director; my comments correspond to the various "means of assessment" described in our Academic Assessment Plan.

Results

A) Evaluation of Skills and Areas Acquired in the Capstone Course:

Our LALS 4003/H Colloquium serves as our program's capstone course. Our program is highly interdisciplinary (currently served by 20 core teaching faculty and spanning 8 disciplines), and the responsibility for teaching the capstone course rotates among our faculty. ***However, during the last three semesters, Spring/Fall (2019), Spring (2020), the director has been responsible for teaching all the colloquiums due to course scheduling conflicts for LALS faculty in their home departments. The assessment generally covers the colloquiums offered in Spring Semester. This year past Spring only one colloquium was offered as part of a ENGL 3000/LALS 4000 combined section: "Intro to U.S. Latino/a/x Literatures and Film."**

1) Assets of the Capstone Course. *While each faculty member develops his or her own, highly focused, senior-level course, our capstones all share the following assets:*

i) Interdisciplinarity: Students acquire knowledge of, and the ability to deploy, a variety of approaches to a focused set of questions or topic of inquiry. For example, "Intro to U.S. Latino/a/x Literatures and Film," is a course that engages with questions of gender, sexuality, ethnic and racial identity, im/migration, and the growth of transnational communities as explored in Latino/a/x poetry, novels, short stories, testimonial narratives, artwork, film, and cultural criticism.

ii) Diversity of perspectives: All capstone classes present a diversity of perspectives and seek to foster cultural awareness and competency. Diversity includes geographic and cultural breadth (from the local and communal to the hemispheric or even global), an awareness of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity, as well as exposure to the various different strata of social interaction. "Intro to U.S. Latino/a/x Literatures and Film" exposed students to a variety of Latinx authors/artists from various ethnic/racial backgrounds (Nuyorican, Cuban American, Dominican American, Chicana/o/x, and U.S. Central American) who likewise represent diverse perspectives and identities in terms of gender, sexuality, citizenship status, and language. A guiding query of the course was not only what it means to be Latinx in a U.S. context but also a transnational and global one.

2) Skill Sets. *Our capstone classes also foster a valuable set of skills. The following skill sets are acquired by students enrolled in our various capstone courses:*

i) Students acquire the ability to conduct research. Students learn how to identify, locate, and use primary sources, and/or how to identify valid, peer-reviewed secondary sources. The construction of a bibliography teaches students the vetting of sources, how to utilize search engines on library servers, modes of bibliographic formatting, and how to synthesize a writer's arguments into a succinct abstract.

ii) Students conduct first-hand ethnographic fieldwork. In the course of planning for, designing, and conducting ethnographic fieldwork, students acquire valuable communication skills; learn how to network

with consultants, cultivate and develop trust relationships; learn how to discern and gather empirical information on the ground; gain cultural competency; learn to apply rigorous ethical standards in human subjects research.

iii) Students write in-depth research papers. Students design and conduct research (ethnographic, archival, and library-based) for their research papers. They learn the value of outlining and how to build an argument; they acquire the ability to articulate a thesis statement; they develop a sustained argument; they learn the importance and use of supporting data/examples; and they gain valuable practice in articulating their ideas in succinct prose.

iv) Students write short, critical reviews. Through book reviews, film reviews, or directed review essays, students learn various modes of interpretation, the application of discipline-based theory to primary-source materials. They acquire valuable practice in analytical thinking and learn to articulate an informed, balanced, and well-supported critique.

v) Students make formal presentations of their work. Through a public presentation of their work (with graded visuals, e.g. PowerPoint/Prezi) to classmates, students learn the value of, and techniques required to generate high-quality visual aids and graphics, and slides with compelling images and succinct prose. They gain experience in public speaking, which prepares them for graduate seminars and/or work world presentations. Furthermore, as audience members, classmates learn how to listen actively and articulate constructive criticism.

3) Evaluation by Comparative Rubric: *We developed a quantitative rubric to be used when evaluating LALS students' final projects, in order to have a numerical point of comparison across all of our LALS 4003 colloquia. Each student's work was rated on a 1-to-5 point scale (1 = unsatisfactory; 5 = excellent). Results are as follows.*

***Note:** This year I opted not to provide an evaluation using the comparative rubric for student papers. Due to COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote teaching forced upon students, I do not believe that the students were able to work under the best circumstances possible or to produce the type of work they would have otherwise. Indeed, of the 8 LALS students who were registered for the colloquium, only 6 turned in the required final research paper. Of those 6, 3 struggled with the paper and with access to materials/periodic internet discussions with the rest of the class. As the instructor for the course, I was also forced to adopt an asynchronous model of teaching remotely (since I had to homeschool young-aged children in my own home) that did not afford my students the same classroom experience or access to me as they would have had otherwise.

B) Latin American and Latino Studies Exit Survey Results:

In keeping with the on-going practice over the LALS four years, we administered an Exit Survey and Questionnaire, to gather evaluative feedback about our program. The Exit Survey was administered to graduating seniors and provides qualitative and quantitative measures of student exposure to various disciplinary approaches to the Latin/o Americas, as well as an indication of their engagement in study abroad opportunities. The following results are germane to this assessment.

i) Declaration of the LALS co-major: Survey results demonstrate that the majority of graduating LALS students (50%) declared the LALS major/minor in their sophomore year in college, 40% declared the major/minor in their junior year, and 10% in their freshmen year. These numbers represent a significant change from LALS year, when 50% of students surveyed stated that they declared in their junior year. Although we still have much work to do to ensure that students have access and information about the LALS co-major/minor as early as possible in their education here, these new numbers suggest we are moving in the right direction and that our targeted efforts working with Fulbright Advising are having an

effect. We hope to likewise strengthen ties with the Honors Program and their recruitment initiatives. At the same time, we continue to remain vigilant about the impact that recent changes to the curriculum of the new International and Global Studies Program (formally International Studies/Relations) have and will have on our numbers. Latin America was a key area of concentration for many INS majors who are no longer required to have a concentration in a specific geographic area. LALSly, we remain concerned about the lack of a dedicated coordinator for La Oficina Latina in the Multicultural Center. This position was unfilled all of LALS year and will most likely be vacant again this year. Both GAs assigned to the LALS program worked to fill this void this past year and to ensure our connection to this key office for Latinx student recruitment and retainment stayed strong.

ii) Language skills: The Exit Survey shows that the majority of our LALS majors/minors are obtaining much more than the minimum language acquisition required for program participation. I.e., we require students to complete SPAN 2013 or equivalent before graduation, yet nearly 85% of respondents had engaged in 4000-level language classes or are heritage speakers (speak Spanish as their first language).

Other languages: This is the fourth year that Portuguese has been offered since being reinstated as a language option in Fall 2016. None of the graduating majors/minors indicated that they had been able to take advantage of this option. Such results made it difficult to ascertain the level of interest in our Portuguese program, which was not the case LALS year. Nevertheless, we expect that interest in Portuguese will continue to rise in coming years. In the future, LALS may also entertain the idea of offering an indigenous language (Quechua, K'iche', Kaqchikel, Aymara, or another of the hundreds of indigenous languages spoken in Central and South America and the Caribbean). Country wide, Centers of Latin American Studies offer Spanish, Portuguese, and at least one indigenous language; we may deploy our Exit Survey to evaluate the viability of this possibility.

iii) Language and literatures, political and economic issues, social and cultural issues, historical trajectories, and the arts in Latin/o America: The Survey asked students to evaluate their satisfaction with the depth of knowledge in, and exposure to, the above-mentioned areas. Each area was ranked by students on a scale ranging from excellent (assigned a value of 4); to good (value of 3); to satisfactory (value of 2); to unsatisfactory (value of 1); to not applicable (n/a = no value). The committee will analyze this data and will present its findings to the core faculty during our AY 2020-21 faculty meetings to discuss weaknesses in our curriculum and to improve our offerings. "The arts" continues to be an area requiring attention. We currently have only one dedicated "Arts" professor in our program (an Art Historian). In the future, LALS plans to lobby for more faculty positions in Art, Art History, Music, Theatre, etc. The proposed hires for the new School of Art (emphasizing the Americas) may offer key opportunities in this regard. Additionally, we hope to include a more visible "arts" component in our interdisciplinary capstone and intro classes and feature the arts more prominently in our lecture series. Defining what is meant by "the arts" is also crucial here, as it may indeed encompass literary arts, visual arts, music, theatre, and film.

Language and literatures: 75% of students ranked their knowledge base in and exposure to language and literatures as "good" or "excellent."

Political/economic issues: 63% of students ranked their knowledge base in and exposure to political/economic issues as "good" or "excellent."

Social and cultural issues: 100% of students ranked their knowledge base in and exposure to social and cultural issues as "good" or "excellent."

Historical trajectories: 88% of students ranked their knowledge base in and exposure to historical trajectories of Latin/o America as "good" or "excellent."

The arts: 50% of students ranked their knowledge base in and exposure to the arts in Latin/o America as "excellent" or "good."

iv) Study Abroad: We view Study Abroad opportunities as important to cultivating well-rounded students (and program). According to the Survey results, just over 60% of respondents engaged in a study abroad program while studying at the U of A. The respondents participated in programs to Spain and Latin America, which represents a significant change from respondents last year of which only 10% studied abroad in Latin America. The vast majority of students who did not study abroad indicated that they did not do so “due to a lack of financial aid or scholarships” for study abroad. We are keenly aware of the lack of financial support for non-honors study abroad at UA, and we find this disparity alarming. Our efforts to establish two study abroad scholarships for our affiliated program in Puebla, Mexico this past year were intended to begin to rectify this situation. Unfortunately, COVID-19 prevented the student awardees from making use of these scholarships. We hope to continue to offer these awards in the future and to explore other avenues for funding more scholarships (via private donors, fundraising through alumni, etc.).

C) Student GPAs:

As stated in our Academic Assessment Plan, we record, track, and compare the GPAs of our graduating LALS co-majors and minors over the course of time. Our LALS students’ GPAs are as follows:

LALS Co-Majors (Spring 2020 graduation) – Average GPA: 3.7

LALS Minors (Spring 2020 graduation) – Average GPA: 3.3

All LALS Co-Majors and Minors (2020 graduates) – Overall Average GPA: 3.6

D) Honors Theses, Conference Presentations, and Publications: The data below provides a record of honors theses, publications, and awards related to Latin American and Latino Studies and/or directed by Latin American and Latino Studies program-affiliated faculty (Spring/Summer 2020). These results will be compared to data from previous years (dating back to 2009) to evaluate areas of program strengths, impact, and needs.

Taylor June

Departmental Scholar of Sociology

Paper Borders: The Role of Legal Activism in Shaping Refugee Resettlement

Juan Jose Bustamante

Rachel Handloser

College Scholar of Anthropology: Magna Cum Laude

Health Risk Assessment of Heavy Metal Pollution from Peruvian Anthropogenic

Benjamin Vining

Alycia Jameson

Departmental Scholar of Latin American & Latino Studies: Cum Laude

Ambiguity in U.S. Asylum Law: The Need for Concrete Protections for Victims of Gender-Based Violence

Yajaira Padilla

Yolanda Chavez

College Scholar of Latin American & Latino Studies: Magna Cum Laude

Constructing a Mainstream Reality: How the Latinx Student and Family Integrates into Higher Education

Juan Bustamante

Jordan Farris

Departmental Scholar of Political Science: Magna Cum Laude

Race, Police Violence, and Justice

Xavier Medina Vidal

Kianna Sarvestani

Departmental Scholar of Political Science: Magna Cum Laude

The Effect Voter Disenfranchisement Has on Jury Source List

Xavier Medina Vidal

Esmerelda Verdin Gomez

College Scholar of Political Science: Summa Cum Laude

What Are You? An Examination of Multiracial Latinos and Linked Fate

Xavier Medina Vidal

Dennis Chase Reavis

Departmental Scholar of Spanish: Cum Laude

The Mexican Rape Culture: Historical roots, modern implications, and representation

Erika Almenara

Use of Results

The most significant findings in our results are the various evaluations of our program's curriculum, its breadth and depth of coverage in each of the noted areas, student matriculation in and evaluation of our Introduction to LALS course, student rates of participation in the capstone course, levels of area language completion, student interest in other Latin American languages, student access to/involvement in study abroad, and the evaluative comparison of capstone colloquia.

Using Survey Results:

The LALS director and faculty will continue to use survey results to help shape and plan future initiatives and directions for our program and to improve our current curriculum. We will discuss student matriculation in the program and strategize how to better reach students at an earlier stage in their college career. We will discuss the level and rates of (Spanish and Portuguese) language attainment. For specific strategies and uses, please see my comments (B-ii above). We will utilize the survey results to discuss areas of strength and weakness in the various disciplines (language/literatures, politics/economics, social/cultural, historical, arts). A comparison of students' evaluations (performed annually via the Survey) will provide information that may inform our requests for faculty/new hires, and it will also help us balance the topics and foci of our own classes (especially the interdisciplinary colloquia and intro). For specific comment on future strategies and uses, please see my comments above (B-iii). We will use the Study Abroad data in order to inform our improvement and spur recruitment into our Puebla study abroad program and to consider other areas/programs. For other uses, please see my comments in B-iv, above.

Assessing the Capstone Colloquium:

Many students take the capstone LALS 4003 colloquium more than once (on different topics) during their college careers. Even though the areas and topics covered by the colloquium differ by semester, across the board LALS 4003 demonstrates curricular strengths including: interdisciplinary training, diversity awareness, bibliography building / annotation, public presentation skills, research skills, the composition of a research paper, the conduct of ethnographic fieldwork, and critical/analytical thinking. All of our capstone classes require some form of writing (typically a research paper, but also at times a series of shorter analytical essays); the LALS faculty developed general rubric to be used by our program's faculty in the assessment of capstone final projects. Faculty will discuss the results of the comparative rubric in Fall 2018 and will evaluate the process and outcome. Year-to-year comparisons may also be made.

GPA: The GPAs of graduating students (co-majors and minors) and overall enrollments will be compared year-by-year. The committee will discuss the results.

Honors Theses, Conference Presentations, and Publications: By comparing results year-to-year (the numbers of theses and publications as well as disciplinary representation) our faculty can gain a sense of upward or downward trends, areas of strength, and program needs. This year, there were 3 honors theses. This is a significant decrease than in previous years. It may be necessary to see next year's numbers to make a judgement as to whether or not this is a significant change in what has been primarily a rising number in the LALS 3-4 years. We will plan to discuss the results during AY 2020-21 and strategize how to become more involved in the honors college and increase our mentorship of four-year and departmental honors students. We may also use this data as a point of discussion about curriculum balance (honors vs. non-honors sections) and recruitment (how to recruit more honors students into the LALS co-major).

Alumni Tracking: Finally, when our faculty convenes in AY 2020-21, we will discuss trends and opportunities for graduates of our program. An examination of the information provided by LALS alumni on post-graduation employment, internships, teaching opportunities, volunteer work, and graduate study will help us identify programmatic strengths and needs.