**Annual Departmental Assessment Report**

**Department or Program: Latin American Studies**

**Academic Year of Report: 2018/19**

**Department Contact Person for Assessment: Pedro García-Caro**

**Section 1: Learning Objectives Assessed for this Report**

For each major in the department, list the learning objectives that were assessed during this period.

*[Major in Latin American Studies]*

1. A comprehensive understanding of Latin American social history
2. A third-year level proficiency or above in a Latin American linguistic variety
3. A multidisciplinary, multi-methodological approach to the region
4. Critical social science-based methods of understanding the region
5. Critical humanistic approaches to the cultural traditions of Latin America
6. Knowledge of pre-modern (pre-18th century) cultural legacies, both pre-colonial and colonial

**Section 2: Assessment Activities**

The information for these goals in collected individually with advising meetings with the program director and main advisor to the major. Students discuss their individual progress in all six goals and the advisor uses a variety of information, from grades to narrative feedback from both students and colleagues to understand the progress in each of the specific goals. Some of the conversations are often carried out in the target language. Student reports by email and feedback on specific courses taken with affiliated faculty proves very useful for future recommendations and to understand the contributions of different offerings. Course assessments of the LAS-course code courses also allows us to understand the ability of students to engage with the completion of goals 1, 3-6.

1. A comprehensive understanding of Latin American social history: students were asked to take panoramic introductory courses to the region, such as our LAS200 Introduction to Latin American Studies, or PS330 Government and Politics of Latin America. These courses emphasize a comparative methodology which allows students to think beyond the national model to understand regional and hemispheric trends which are particularly relevant for area studies.
2. A third-year level proficiency or above in a Latin American linguistic variety: this objective is achieved outside the direct purview of our small program. Before declaring the major, students arrive with a third-year level competency in a Latin American languages, they take courses at the three-year level in Spanish or Portuguese, and potentially in an indigenous language (though this is rare as our capacity to either offerthem or to test in them is negligible). These classes are taken either on campus, or abroad, or as transfer credits. Bilingual students are also able to test their third-year level skills at the department of Romance Languages. In the major, students are also expected to take two literary or cultural surveys in Spanish or Portuguese as part of their required courses (SPAN343, 344 typically, and PORT399, or other three-hundred level classes have been credited to this requirement). Many majors in LAS study abroad as part of their undergraduate experience, with direct enrollment programs as particularly popular choices (though we mostly can only offer the exchange program with UNAM in Mexico, some students have enrolled in classes in Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Argentina over the last few years). Our program has also consolidated the practice of allowing students to conduct work for their capstone seminar LAS407 in Spanish (though the course is taught in English), and these credits can also be applied to their SPANISH major or minor, thus further demonstrating the program’s commitment to linguistic competency to discuss area studies’ methods and issues.
3. A multidisciplinary, multi-methodological approach to the region: direct, personalized advising of students allows for a remarkably varied portfolio of courses to be part of the 20 elective credits students are expected to take from a wide variety of disciplines. The major structure with its foundational commitment to both social history (objective 4) and to cultural history (objective 5) is already multidisciplinary in its approach. Students are also asked to take eight additional credits in a social science subject code other than history, so International Studies, Anthropology, Ethnic Studies, Political Sciences, Geography, and Sociology become key strengths to which our majors are drawn. They combine these approaches with an engagement with the cultural and humanistic offerings in Art History, Spanish, Philosophy, Cultural Anthropology, Music, Theatre Arts, and Portuguese, and they become very proficient at understanding regional issues and problems within different paradigms and terminologies. These is a feature of the area studies fields which is prominent not only in undergraduate studies, but also in editorial boards, journals, and academic associations. Students are exposed to a wide variety of assessments and methodologies to understand both social and historical issues and their symbolic representations in culture.
4. Critical social science-based methods of understanding the region: related to the last goal is a very specific commitment to a social scientific training of our majors, which is achieved through a number of requirements throughout the major. Three of the foundational requirements come from history and field-specific introductory courses (LAS200 and LAS212). Students are asked to take 8 additional credits in the social sciences other than history to provide for an exposure to sociological and anthropological, as well as geographic and other social scientific methodologies.
5. Critical humanistic approaches to the cultural traditions of Latin America: Besides the linguistic and literary emphasis of part of the required courses (with the third-year level competency, goal 1), students are asked to take to literary/cultural surveys, and for their electives many students take courses on Chicano literature in English or in Ethnic Studies, courses in Folklore or Cultural anthropology, music or art history, as well as the very popular courses of Philosophy of Latin America offered on our campus. This allows for a variety of approaches, discourses, methods, and emphases which approach human cultures in Latin American from a variety of perspectives and to a wide range of archives.
6. Lastly, the objective of Knowledge of pre-modern (pre-18th century) cultural legacies, both pre-colonial and colonial which is deemed as a very relevant component of the training in the area, is secured by out of the program offerings in History, Spanish, and Art History mostly which cover the period of the conquest and study in detail pre-Columbian societies and the ways in which they became Latinized and accultured into Western forms of culture, creating uniquely new forms of creolized cultures in the Americas. Students are asked to at least take 4 credits in this period as a way to understand more deeply both the social and the cultural issues they study in more contemporary settings.

**Section 3: Actions Taken Based on Assessment Analysis**

The only aspect to report here is for points 3, 5, and 6 and in all cases it relates to the limited amount of course offerings in Portuguese and in pre-18th century history and culture. Latin American Studies engages in an understanding of the region that requires a more in-depth cultural approach than that provided by Hispanism (Spanish code classes). Students need to become more familiar with indigenous languages and cultures and our offerings on campus are fairly limited. Portuguese and dual language competency in Spanish and Portuguese, or Spanish and an indigenous language is also a fairly expected standard of the field across the country and beyond. Our limited upper-divisions offerings in Portuguese create a very challenging panorama for our students, often solved imaginatively by taking courses abroad or by independent study. Our program has assessed this challenge for years and pleas to the college and the administration to better cater for a diversity of faculty lines in the different periods, languages and regions of Latin America have not been particularly successful. Still, our program is able to make do thanks to its specific strengths in the colonial period in the History Department and in the Romance Languages departments. Current retirements will make this picture very different in the next few years.

**Section 4: Other Efforts to Improve the Student Educational Experience**

An increasingly active advising approach has proven very useful, with regular term meetings with each individual major and minor in the program. Students reporting scheduling challenges have benefitted from direct discussions of alternatives to the major requirements that could be met with independent studies with key affiliated faculty or with alternative courses.

**Section 5: Plans for Next Year**

Our current budget challenges and the chronic lack of support for the program from the college in the form of lack of course release for the program director mean that even coming together to create a report such as this is a major challenge. The extremely thin structure of support for the program has not undercut our belief in its merits and in the success of our students, both majors and minors, and we continue to rely in the good will of our departmental partners who still strongly uphold the highest academic standards in their course offerings and allow us to meet the intended goals for the major with their unique mix of expertise in many different fields that study the region. We will continue to assess the success of our students and will likely need to change the standard of expectation for historical knowledge given the disinvestment in the particular are of pre-18th century in our campus.