Final Report
Academic Program Review
American Culture Studies

Review Process

The program in American Culture Studies prepared a self-study following program review guidelines. An external review committee, comprised of two faculty from other institutions, visited the campus, reviewed the self-study and interviewed department personnel, students, and University administrators. The Program Review Committee (PRC) reviewed the external report and self-study and discussed the Program with the Director and the Dean of Arts & Sciences. This document reflects the PRC’s findings and recommendations.

Self-Study

Mission

The American Culture Studies Program was formed in 1989 when the B.A. and M.A. programs in American Studies were merged with the Ph.D. program in American Culture. At the undergraduate level, the mission is largely service: ACS 200, 230, 250, and 300 satisfy university General Education requirements. Of particular note, one component of the General Education program – Cultural Diversity in the U.S. – is satisfied by ACS 250, Cultural Pluralism in the U.S. The mission of undergraduate courses in ACS is to promote interdisciplinary thinking, critical reading and writing skills, and an appreciation of the expansiveness of American culture.

At the graduate level, ACS offers M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. The graduate programs are the primary areas of focus for ACS. Graduates are prepared for professions within academia and in museums, historical societies, business, and educational administration.

As an interdisciplinary program, another aspect of the ACS mission is to serve as a focal point for interdisciplinary scholarship. ACS is involved in the endeavors of affiliated faculty such as two journals and a working paper series.

Faculty and Staff
As an interdisciplinary program, ACS is not a tenure-granting unit. At the time the self-study was written, ACS had a core faculty of five with joint appointments in ACS and other departments. The workload obligation varies for these faculty from a high of 100% to a low of 12%. In addition to the core faculty, ACS has affiliated faculty from 12 academic units. At the time the self-study was written, the joint-appointment and affiliated faculty comprised eleven professors, eleven associate professors, nine assistant professors and two instructors, for a total of 33. (The self-study was updated just before it was turned in; thus Appendix 1 lists 37 joint-appointment and affiliated faculty).

The core affiliated faculty serve on ACS M.A. and Ph.D. committees. Core faculty and an elected Ph.D. student serve on the ACS Executive Committee. Affiliated faculty may represent their units on the ACS Policy Committee. The Policy Committee also consists of one elected Ph.D. student, one M.A. student and one graduate student of color. The director chairs the Policy Committee.

ACS currently assigns 13 graduate students to teach ACS 200, 230, 250, and 300. ACS funds from its allocation graduate teaching assistants to seven departments, one half-time assistantship to the journal Genders, and one half-time assistantship to the Center for Archival Collections.

ACS has one secretary. The self-study lists no work-study assistance.

**Students**

The number of undergraduate students majoring in ACS has remained small since the mid-1990’s. The program graduated a high of six in 1997-98 and a low of two in 1998-99. The low number of majors is consistent with the low number of 300-400 level courses the program is able to offer.

Appendix 4 lists the total number of ACS graduate students at 79 for the fall semester, 1999. Of these 22 are M.A. students and 57 are Ph.D. Twelve percent are listed as being Black, Asian/Pacific, or Hispanic, 71% are listed as White, and 18% are listed as Unknown. Of the 29 currently funded Ph.D. students (fall, 1999), 24% are of color. Appendix 4 lists the primary concentrations for Ph.D. students in the Fall Semester, 1999, as follows: English 4, History 9, Communication Studies 2, Popular Culture 16, Sociology 2, and Ethnic Studies 1. The data from Appendix 4 include all students currently registered, not just students actively taking classes.

M.A. students are required to complete 33 hours, 15 in ACS and the remainder from affiliated departments and/or thesis credit. Most students in ACS write a master’s thesis.

Ph.D. students are required to take 12 hours of an ACS core, 18 hours in a primary concentration, and 9 hours in a secondary concentration. Students must also complete two courses in an interdisciplinary core and a 3-hour field experience. Ph.D. students must present a scholarly paper, pass a qualifying examination in ACS, and pass a preliminary examination in areas of concentration.

**Facilities**
In the Fall of 1997, ACS relocated from University Hall to a suite of offices in the newly built East Hall.

**Teaching Loads and Scholarly Productivity**

As an interdisciplinary program, ACS does not establish its own teaching loads for affiliated faculty, nor does it establish its own tenure/promotion and merit policies.

The 32 affiliated faculty members who supplied information for the self-study had published 39 scholarly books or monographs, 37 edited books, and 394 journal articles and book chapters. These are career data for all faculty.

**Undergraduate Program**

*General Education Classes.* ACS contributes substantially to BGSU’s General Education Curriculum. Currently, 56% of all courses that fulfill the cultural diversity requirement are taught by ACS instructors. Thirty-nine percent of all cultural diversity courses are taught by ACS graduate students, 13% by affiliated faculty, and 4% by recent ACS graduates.

*Major and Minor in ACS.* An advantage of the small number of majors and minors is the careful advising that students receive from the director of undergraduate studies. In response to student suggestions, a new emphasis is being added, “Society and Change.” Also, the capstone course is being revised to include theoretical and practical work.

**Master’s Program**

The self-study states that the master’s program exists independently from, yet supports, the Ph.D. program. Often, master’s and doctoral students find themselves in the same class, to mutual benefit. The quality of M.A. students admitted is strong. Four students of a possible 47 have failed to earn degrees. Most students take four semesters to earn the M.A. The self-study encourages exploration of ways to prepare M.A. students for careers in non-academic professions. It also encourages exploration of ways that ACS can better serve the needs of Ohio’s secondary school teachers through its master’s program.

**Graduate Program: The Ph.D. and OBOR Viability Standards**

As described above, the ACS joint-appointed faculty and affiliated faculty are drawn from a variety of academic units. They comprise a mature faculty who are productive in scholarly journals and books. The self-study reports that the ACS affiliated faculty are active in pursuing external and internal funding for research, but no amounts are provided.

Between May, 1993 and the beginning of fall semester, 1999, 45 doctorates were awarded in ACS. Of these, 15 currently hold tenured or tenure-track positions, 10 hold full-time but not tenure-track positions, 12 hold full-time non-academic positions, 3 are unemployed, and 4 are unknown. The Director reports six recent Ph.D.s secured tenure-track jobs since the self-study was written.
ACS demonstrates its vitality by pointing to: an informal reading group, occasional transdisciplinary seminars, opportunities to work with faculty on conference-planning (both within and outside of ACS), faculty involvement in three graduate student conferences, undergraduate student paper competition, opportunities for graduate students to publish with faculty, establishment of an ACS student organization, sponsorship of social and scholarly events, promotion of student leadership on program and university committees and promotion of student service to the surrounding community.

The self-study reports that applications to the Ph.D. program remain strong, but specific data on the number of applications are not provided.

The self-study argues that the quality of admitted applicants is strong. The mean GRE verbal scores for the last six applicant pools range from a low of 558 (1999-00) to a high of 598 (1995-96). The mean graduate GPA of applicants to the Ph.D. program ranged from 3.73 to 3.87.

Assessment

ACS intends to develop an expanded assessment plan in 1999-2000. For the undergraduate curriculum, the plan will include an alumni survey, possibly the revised capstone course, and a before/after essay exam in the 200-level courses.

ACS has identified five learning outcomes for M.A. students and eight learning outcomes for Ph.D. students. Assessment is based on successful completion of courses and requirements for the degrees.

Strategic Plan

The self-study’s strategic plan “requests a commitment from the University on several fronts.”

Personnel. The self-study requests commitment for an outside search for a new director. It further requests that the current director be assigned full-time to ACS following his term as director. In order to staff undergraduate classes at the current level, the self-study requests that the current one-year instructor position be converted to a permanent (five-year term instructor) line. The self-study makes a detailed argument to increase the number of joint-appointments to ACS, although it does not offer solutions to problems of merit review, promotion and tenure outside of the department structure.

Location. The self-study requests a move of ACS from East Hall to Shatzel Hall.

Resources. ACS reports a need for an immediate increase to operating budget by $2000 and increase total to $12,000 within three years. The current budget is $8,371.

Structures. ACS sees a need for reconfiguration that will enhance interdisciplinary study. Toward that end, the self-study requests the establishment of a committee to explore reconfiguration possibilities, such as a School of Cultural Studies.
External Review Findings

The external review team acknowledged the originality and far-sightedness that created ACS. ACS has “pioneered approaches to American Studies now commonplace in the field.” The team also concludes that significant rethinking of the program now is warranted for it to “achieve its potential for national excellence in the interdisciplinary study of American culture and society.”

The team notes that ACS faces “serious challenges” in the light of several constraints:

1) Limited power to effect joint appointments with other units.
2) Reliance upon other departments to provide training and teaching assignments for its students.
3) Inadequate staff to build the undergraduate major.
4) Differing and occasionally conflicting needs between ACS and Popular Culture. This item is particularly illustrated by the inability for ACS students to enroll in Popular Culture courses.
5) Assignment of graduate teaching assistants to ACS service courses.

The team concludes that ACS clearly merits support from the College of Arts and Sciences to “renew its curriculum and achieve its potential for national excellence.” To this end, the team recommends the following:

1) Discourage separate curricular initiatives by ACS and Popular Culture and foster their collaboration (“with an eye towards future integration”).
2) Approve national search for a new director.
3) Appoint the former director full-time in ACS.
4) Upgrade the current lecturer to an assistant professor, or visiting assistant professor.
5) Increase the number of undergraduate majors.
6) Increase graduate student stipends to $10.5K.
7) Increase development and outreach efforts, particularly in securing sponsorships for graduate internships.
8) Create a fresh mission for ACS, possibly as the “interdisciplinary, historically minded study of cultures and peoples of the United States, with particular attention to media and society.”
9) Restructure the way that the Cultural diversity requirement is delivered and work for a more equitable distribution among programs and departments that offer courses fulfilling this requirement.
10) The external team notes ACS has a small operating budget.

Program Review Committee Findings

The PRC has reviewed the self-study prepared by ACS, the report provided by the external review team, and the written response by ACS to questions for discussion developed by the PRC. In addition, the PRC met with the ACS Director (both the incumbent and the named successor), and with the Dean of the College of
Interdisciplinary studies at BGSU are important to its intellectual and educational vitality. A succession of directors has worked hard to bring together talented faculty from across the university. The history of the ACS program is characterized by innovation, and that has contributed to the national reputation of the program and BGSU.

It is also the case that new efforts are needed to foster collaboration and cooperation between ACS and its affiliated faculty, particularly the faculty in Popular Culture. The absence of a collaborative relationship with Popular Culture has hurt both units. The College office appears ready to reward demonstrated collaboration with tangible support. Both the undergraduate and graduate programs in ACS now must be reexamined and adapted to current institutional circumstances and statewide mandates.

The process currently used in ACS for admitting and funding graduate students is at best awkward. No one can explain it well, and no one expresses satisfaction with it. The process must become more participatory and straightforward, and it must advance the interests of ACS, Popular Culture and the University. In this regard, the PRC notes the University priority of increasing graduate enrollments to reverse the decline of the last five years. The Ph.D. in ACS has seen a 6.4% decline since 1997.

The PRC finds that ACS must work to establish a distinctive focus. ACS, as a graduate program, is not well-served by ambiguity in its mission. ACS must work aggressively in its outreach and pedagogy to respond to the “exceptional moment” offered by enduring interests in media technologies and forms of cultural identification and communication. These interests should shape the development of a new focus for ACS.

The PRC finds that the “planning” part of the self-study comprises only a set of requests for support. Although it may be the case that more institutional support is warranted and necessary, the absence of substantive responsibilities or actions to be taken by the program itself is short-sighted. There are a number of actions that the program could take that would lead to self-improvement and that would add substantial credibility to the requests for support from the College.

For instance, the ACS program has done very little to institute assessment of student learning outcomes for any of its programs. Implementation of assessment can lead to improvement of student performance and provide evidence that investment in this program would be well founded.

The PRC finds that assigning graduate teaching assistants the primary responsibility for teaching cultural diversity courses is unwise. ACS must intensify its efforts to utilize faculty from cooperating departments, full- or part-time instructors, or joint appointments to staff these courses. Help from the Dean of Arts & Sciences will be necessary to gain support from other departments and to
implement changes in an orderly way. As those changes occur, ACS should reassign the teaching assistants to supportive roles in courses connected to the newly defined areas of programmatic focus at the Ph.D. level.

The PRC commends the efforts by ACS faculty to take seriously the preparation of its graduate teaching assistants. The responsibility for this training, however, currently resides with an instructor who is also the Director of Undergraduate Studies. The Director of Undergraduate studies currently shoulders a significant burden in ACS that should be taken on by regular faculty.

The external team recommended that the number of undergraduate majors be increased. However, the PRC cautions against building a major that will compete with existing programs (notably Popular Culture). Although we support efforts to make the ACS undergraduate program successful, we find no need to increase competition between ACS and other programs for undergraduate majors.

The PRC finds no support for the establishment of a School of Culture Studies. However, there is a need to find new ways to support interdisciplinary studies and to promote and reward faculty participation in interdisciplinary program areas outside their departments. If this is to occur, the Dean of Arts & Sciences must take a leading role.

Program Review Committee Recommendations

PRC recommendations are made in light of the findings identified above, Ohio Board of Regents Quality Standards for doctoral programs, and University priorities for research and graduate education: improved record of external funding, increased enrollments and enhanced diversity of the graduate student population.

1) The PRC recommends that the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences appoint a committee to investigate the feasibility of redesigning the ACS Ph.D. program. While the number of faculty on the committee is left to the discretion of the Dean, the PRC believes it is critical that there be equal representation of faculty from Popular Culture and ACS, and that a spirit of cooperation and collaboration is demonstrated. The committee should be charged with restructuring the program such that students would receive a degree in Cultural Studies and would have the option of concentrating in one of two tracks: either Popular Culture or American Culture, the latter to be designed by the faculty involved in the ACS program. In restructuring the program, the PRC recommends particular attention to the OBR Viability Standards in order to ensure future viability of the doctoral program. Restructuring must also emphasize improvement in achieving University priorities. It is further recommended that:

a) This committee be charged with developing policy and procedures that would give the faculty in Popular Culture control over admission and evaluation standards of students intending to concentrate in Popular Culture. The policies and procedures developed must address the University
priority to maintain healthy enrollments.

b) The committee should also explore how the M.A. programs in Popular Culture and ACS might be combined or modified to serve as a common core for the ACS Ph.D. program.

c) The committee is expected to report to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences with specific recommendations for restructuring the program no later than March of 2001.

d) If a workable program and plans for implementation are not completed to the satisfaction of the Chair of the Department of Popular Culture, the Director of the ACS Program, the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, and the Graduate Dean, we recommend that the Graduate Dean suspend admission to the ACS Ph.D. program.

e) Assuming the committee’s proposal is acceptable to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate Dean, we recommend that the new program be initiated.

2) The PRC recommends that the ACS core and affiliated faculties (including faculty in Popular Culture) engage in a critical dialogue to clearly articulate the focus of the program. The focus should be constructed to allow ACS to maximize the interdisciplinary resources at BGSU and establish a national reputation for excellence in interdisciplinary studies of American Culture. The discussion could use as a starting point the suggestion by the external team that an appropriate focus for ACS is the “interdisciplinary, historically minded study of cultures and peoples of the United States, with particular attention to media and society.” This discussion should take place during Fall Semester of 2000, with a report being filed with the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences by the end of the term.

3) The PRC recommends that the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences form a task force charged with developing a plan to increase interdepartmental collaboration and cooperation. It is imperative that this task force address the issue of how to promote and reward faculty involvement in interdisciplinary programs without putting the faculty member or his/her home department at a disadvantage. The task force’s recommendation should be submitted to the Dean by the end of Spring Semester, 2001.

4) The PRC agrees with the external review team that a way must be found to restructure the delivery of the cultural diversity requirement. Because nearly all of the courses used to meet this requirement come from the College of Arts and Sciences, the PRC recommends that the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences develop an appropriate process for accomplishing equitable redistribution of cultural diversity courses among departments and programs in A&S. As this is accomplished, ACS should reassign graduate assistants to supportive roles in courses connected to the newly defined areas of programmatic focus at the Ph.D. level (in coordination with recommendations 1 and 2).
5) The PRC believes it is important that the Department of Popular Culture and the ACS Program be housed physically close to one another. The PRC recommends that the Dean of Arts & Sciences:

   a) investigate alternative space to house the two units in close proximity; and

   b) investigate the feasibility of obtaining the capital necessary to build a new facility to house the Department of Popular Culture, American Culture Studies, the Popular Culture Library, and technically equipped classrooms. We further recommend that the Development Office be engaged in this to ascertain whether there is a possibility of seeking a major gift donor.

6) The PRC recommends that ACS direct renewed attention toward assessment of learning outcomes for both the undergraduate major and the graduate programs. The ACS program should implement at least one new assessment activity for the Ph.D. and master’s degrees by the end of Spring Semester, 2001, and one new assessment activity for the undergraduate programs (including the major, the minor and its general education courses) by the end of Spring Semester, 2002. The ACS program should engage in assessment of all its programs as part of its regular functioning. Assessment reports should be made yearly to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Vice Provost for Academic Programs.

   The Program in American Culture Studies should report annually to the Dean of Arts & Sciences, with a copy to the Provost, on the implementation of these recommendations.