

Annual/Biennial Program Assessment Report

Academic Year Assessed: 2022-2023
College: Letters and Science
Department: Program in American Studies
Submitted by: **Susan Kollin**

Undergraduate Assessment reports are to be submitted annually. The report deadline is October 15th.

Graduate Assessment reports are to be submitted biennially. The report deadline is October 15th.

Program(s) Assessed

Undergraduate Major in American Studies

YES -- Have you reviewed the most recent Annual Program Assessment Report submitted and Assessment and Outcomes Committee feedback? (please contact Assistant Provost Deborah Blanchard if you need a copy of either one).

The Assessment Report should contain the following elements, which are outlined in this template and includes additional instructions and information.

1. Past Assessment Summary.
2. Action Research Question.
3. Assessment Plan, Schedule, and Data Source(s).
4. What Was Done.
5. What Was Learned.
6. How We Responded.
7. Closing the Loop.

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1. Past Assessment Summary.

In our prior assessment report, we mentioned that the program was working to get back on track after experiencing several changes in our leadership during the previous two years. With a new Director in place, we focused on making sure that we restored stability to the program, especially in terms of communications and procedures. In addition, this year we were able to assess AMST 401R, which we were not able to last year because it was not offered. Through our experiences with the assessment process from last time, we determined that there may be alternative approaches for assessing student achievement that tracks learning from the lower to

upper-division level even during a year when AMST 401R is not offered. A possible solution would be to identify majors in the program and then assess their written work in elective and/or required classes offered elsewhere at the 300 or 400-level. This solution may be especially appropriate for us, as we are an interdisciplinary program that draws on coursework from a number of different disciplines for our major.

2. Action Research Question. What question are you seeking to answer in this cycle’s assessment?

Do the writing assignments developed for this year offer students the opportunity to construct persuasive arguments and thesis statements that are informed by interdisciplinary sources and methodologies?

3. Assessment Plan, Schedule, and Data Source(s).

MAJOR LEARNING OUTCOMES—AMST

Our students will:

1. be able to understand the ways American culture can be interpreted from multiple perspectives.
2. be able to apply the analytical methods of AMST to a range of historical and contemporary issues.
3. be able to construct persuasive arguments and construct an effective thesis statement.
4. be able to communicate effectively.
5. be able to use evidence from primary and secondary sources in making an argument.
6. be able to cite sources according to the conventions of the discipline.

	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	26-27
AMST 101D	3,4	5,6	1,2	3,4	5,6
AMST 401R Capstone	3,4	5,6	1,2	3,4	5,6

ASSESSMENT PLANNING SCHEDULE CHART					
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	COURSES MAPPED TO PLOs	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Our students will be able to construct a persuasive argument and an effective thesis statement.	AMST 101D and AMST 401R	XX			XX
Our students will be able to communicate effectively.	AMST 101D and AMST 401R	XX			XX
Our students will be able to use evidence from primary and secondary sources in making an argument.	AMST 101D and AMST 401R		XX		
Our students will be able to cite sources according to the conventions of the discipline.	AMST 101D and AMST 401R		XX		
Our students will be able to understand the ways American culture can be interpreted from multiple perspectives.	AMST 101D and AMST 401R			XX	
Our students will be able to apply the analytical methods of AMST to a range of historical and contemporary issues.	AMST 101D and AMST 401R			XX	

Threshold Values		
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	Threshold Value	Data Source(s)*
Learning Outcome #3— Our students will be able to construct a persuasive argument and an effective thesis statement.	<i>The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score above 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.</i>	<i>Randomly selected student essays from AMST 101 and AMST 401</i>
Learning Outcome #4— Our students will be able to communicate effectively.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score above a 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.	Randomly selected student essays from AMST 101 and AMST 401

4. What Was Done

- a) Was the completed assessment consistent with the program's assessment plan? If not, please explain the adjustments that were made.

Yes

- b) How were data collected and analyzed and by whom? Please include method of collection and sample size.

The Director collected data for AMST 101D: Introduction to American Studies in the form of 10 random essays or 7% of the class. The materials were distributed to the committee members with student names removed. The Director also collected final papers from all members of AMST 401R with student names removed. The materials were analyzed by the Director and two additional members of the assessment committee. One member has a joint appointment in the AMST program and another CLS department, while the other committee member has taught in the AMST program and has chaired or served on numerous AMST graduate committees over the past several years. The two members were chosen because they have extensive knowledge of American Studies as an academic field and direct experience with the program at MSU.

Major Learning Outcome #3—Our students will be able to construct persuasive arguments and construct an effective thesis statement.

Indicators	Unacceptable - 1	Acceptable- 2	Good- 3	Excellent- 4
Our students will be able to construct a persuasive argument and an effective thesis statement.	The paper lacks an understanding of how to construct persuasive arguments or an effective thesis statement.	The paper gestures toward an understanding of how to construct persuasive arguments and develop an effective thesis statement.	The paper shows an understanding of how to construct persuasive arguments and an effective thesis statement.	The paper shows a sophisticated understanding of how to construct a persuasive argument and an effective thesis statement.

Major Learning Outcome #4—Our students will be able to communicate effectively.

Indicators	Unacceptable - 1	Acceptable- 2	Good- 3	Excellent- 4
Our students will be able to communicate effectively.	The paper shows no evidence that the author is able to communicate effectively in writing.	The paper demonstrates some success in communicating ideas effectively but may not have a strong grasp of these concepts.	The paper shows an understanding of how to communicate ideas effectively.	The paper shows a sophisticated ability to communicate ideas effectively.

5. What Was Learned

- a) Based on the analysis of the data, and compared to the threshold values established, what was learned from the assessment?

Our assessment of AMST 101D papers indicates that we met our threshold of 75% of students, which involves achieving scores above a 2 on the rubric criteria. The average scores across three committee members were 2.8, 3.6, and 2.9. For the most successful papers, we noted that they were marked by “a well-developed understanding of sources and their audiences,” that they were “notable in their ability to analyze events through multiple perspectives and comment on how different perspectives enable us to see events in distinct ways,” and that “they connected strongly with the assignment which showed in their commitment to their arguments.” One committee member was pleased that many of the papers explore interesting ideas. The members went on to note that the students are clearly learning important ideas about American Studies as an interdisciplinary field. On the other hand, committee members noted that occasionally an essay was too informational rather than argumentative or that it qualified a point in the argument to the extent that it became difficult to follow the main point.

It should be noted for the purposes of assessment that we often have different instructors teaching AMST 101D for the first time. For instance, we will have three different instructors teaching the course for us over four semesters. To maintain continuity in the class, the assessment committee recommends sharing our findings with the instructors at the time in which they are developing the course.

For AMST 401R (capstone), we met our threshold of 75% of the assessed materials earning a 2 or above. The average scores across the committee members were 3, 4, and 3.5. A committee member noted in particular how the writers did an excellent job by taking on quite difficult topics, such as the concept of post-truth, and developing their ideas into a compelling argument. We were pleased that the authors were persuasive in that they considered alternate viewpoints and were able to synthesize research. We noted too that the writing offered a useful and important historical overview of developments that are often misrecognized as recent or contemporary issues. In providing historical context, the writer was able to stake out a stronger position in the argument.

In assessing the essays, we noted that the requirement to write an abstract of the research essay and including it in the beginning of the essay proved to be particularly useful in helping students carefully articulate the claims and arguments that shape their work. We were also impressed by efforts to develop and draw on a unique archive in producing an interdisciplinary argument appropriate to the field of AMST that was informed by more than merely “aesthetic” concerns. Finally, committee members were impressed by the demonstrated sophistication of the capstone papers as a whole. The authors showed clear growth as thinkers and writers. They demonstrated a superior and even exceptional ability to produce an original interpretation of primary documents.

- b) What areas of strength in the program were identified from this assessment process?

Readers noted how the artifacts drew on timely and relevant topics in the field and offered interesting and engaging analyses. Students showed their intellectual and affective connection to the material and the ways it touches both their everyday and scholarly lives.

- c) What areas were identified that either need improvement or could be improved in a different way from this assessment process?

A lesson to take away here is that it is important to establish clear communication about coursework expectations and learning outcomes with faculty who may not teach in our program on a regular basis. This will enable us to establish continuity and cohesion for our interdisciplinary majors from semester to semester.

6. How We Responded.

a). Describe how “What Was Learned” was communicated to the department, or program faculty. How did faculty discussions re-imagine new ways program assessment might contribute to program growth/improvement/innovation beyond the bare minimum of achieving program learning objectives through assessment activities conducted at the course level?

The committee met and discussed our findings on November 2nd, 2023. Based on our findings, we are committed to improving our communications with the instructors who teach our courses, especially AMST 101D. We plan to share resources early in the process of developing the class, including syllabi, course assignments, and assessment findings.

b. How are the results of this assessment informing changes to enhance student learning in the program?

Based on this year’s assessment, we plan to share our findings with TT and NTT faculty well in advance of the semester in which they teach. While the Director already schedules meetings with instructors, there is clearer information this year that will better guide those discussions. Now entering their second year in the position after several leadership changes in the program, the Director has gained more experience with what has been pedagogically successful in the previous year and will now be able to share that information more fully with the faculty.

c. If information outside of this assessment is informing programmatic change, please describe that.

N/A

d. What support and resources (e.g. workshops, training, etc.) might you need to make these adjustments?

The assessment committee looks forward to having the opportunity to attend additional training sessions on assessment when they are scheduled. This year, the Director met one-on-one with the Assistant Provost which was very helpful in understanding how assessment goals and procedures work. It was also beneficial to have a university-wide meeting geared toward MSU expectations for assessment with additional information made available to faculty.

7. Closing the Loop(s). Reflect on the program learning outcomes, how they were assessed in the previous cycle (refer to #1 of the report), and what was learned in this cycle. What action will be taken to improve student learning objectives going forward?

- a) In reviewing the last report that assessed the PLO(s) in this assessment cycle, what changes proposed were implemented and will be measured in future assessment reports?
1. It is clear that work on assessment needs to take place throughout the year rather than just in the fall. This will enable us to track our achievements and note areas that need improvement.
 2. We look forward to determining the artifacts we'll need to collect if we are unable to assess final papers in 401R and the "depth of student understanding relative to program outcomes."
 3. We plan to improve our methods of disseminating our findings and sharing results with our faculty. This will take place during the semester before they begin teaching for us.
- b) Have you seen a change in student learning based on other program adjustments made in the past? Please describe the adjustments made and subsequent changes in student learning.

The Director has not been in place long enough to have a sense of the long-term impact of our assessment of the program at this point, but it is something we are making sure to keep in mind for future assessments.