

## **American Studies Assessment Plan**

### **1. Learning goals: what formal learning outcomes are students expected to achieve in the major?**

The American Studies major provides an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural approach to the study of the United States within a hemispheric context. We ask majors to draw on the intellectual resources of a variety of disciplines--anthropology, art history, literature, history, music, religion and sociology--as well as other interdisciplinary fields. Students are required to choose a concentration within American Studies that explores in detail a specific aspect of the culture(s) and society of the United States. It may be built around a discipline (such as history, literary criticism, government, sociology), a field (such as cultural studies, critical race studies, queer studies), or a "problematic" (such as ecology and culture, politics and culture).

In addition to its interdisciplinary emphasis, American Studies at Wesleyan stresses a comparative approach to the study of the United States. By studying cultural phenomena across national boundaries, we expect American Studies majors to develop a rich understanding of the complex histories and current realities that have resulted from the conflict and confluence of European, indigenous, African, and Asian cultures throughout the Western Hemisphere.

We introduce majors to a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to an intercultural analysis of the Americas. We ask them to select from among an array of junior colloquia that explore a range of theoretical perspectives utilized in American Studies, consider the history and changing shape of the multifaceted American Studies enterprise, and engage students in research and analysis. Those research and analytical skills are further developed through our senior requirement which can be satisfied with a senior seminar, essay, or thesis.

Ultimately, our goal for our majors is that they develop a critical, theoretically informed understanding of the United States as a political, social, and cultural formation that exists in and had its inception in a transnational context of imperial expansion and global capitalism. In addition, we want our majors to develop the skills in research and writing that will allow them to apply that understanding to concrete and particular issues and convey the results of their analysis effectively.

In addition, American Studies has a history at Wesleyan of responding when students bring to us their desire to expand the curriculum in new directions. Our emphases on critical race/ethnic studies, queer studies, and indigenous studies are recent examples of such expansions. One of our goals is to continue to do this as students approach us with new concerns and interests.

### **2. Method of evaluation: what evidence is used to determine that graduates have achieved the stated outcomes of the major?**

We ask rising junior majors to submit a one-page description of the concentration that they have selected (or designed) that explains how their proposed concentration will meet both their goals for their education and the Department's expectation that they develop a critical interdisciplinary perspective on the United States that situates it in a cross-cultural context. This statement is to be submitted to their major advisor during fall pre-registration.

Second semester senior majors are required to submit a one-page assessment of how effectively they have met both the Department's curricular goals and their own personal goals for their major. Again, this statement is to be emailed to the department administrative assistant who attaches the senior assessment to the concentration description submitted by the student when a junior. Teams of faculty then will meet with senior majors in informal focus groups (over lunch) to collect student feedback based on the paired (junior and senior year) statements.

### **3. Process of evaluation: who interprets the evidence, and by what process?**

The Department faculty will use their review of student plans and self-assessments, along with feedback from the focus groups, to draft the agenda for an annual assessment meeting and as the basis for ongoing curricular planning and revision.