





**Program Review Summary**  
**Memorandum of Understanding**  
American Studies Program  
College of Liberal Arts  
April 2026

This document summarizes the findings of the Program Review and serves as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the consensus reached by the American Studies (AMST) Program, the College of Liberal Arts, and the Division of Academic Affairs following the recently conducted program review. The external review was completed by Drs. Lane and Sze in September 2025. This report and MOU describe the goals to be achieved and the actions to be undertaken by all parties during the next program review cycle. Progress toward these goals will be addressed in an annual report.

The American Studies Program offers a BA in American Studies, a 36-unit interdisciplinary degree. The program also offers a minor in American Studies, which is not included in this review. Although the program has not formally departmentalized, American Studies faculty successfully worked to make the program independent of the History Department. In Fall 2021, the program received designation as an independent program within the College of Liberal Arts.

The program has made progress in several areas identified in the 2021 MOU (for the 2017-2018 review). The MOU specified the following needs: 1) The Program will consult with the Director of Program Review and Assessment to develop appropriate alignment of SLOs, PLOs, and ILOs, and to develop an assessment plan. Student/Program learning outcomes should be more specific to AMST, and be explicitly incorporated in all extant AMST courses; 2) The Program will provide an annual update (due June 1) on progress made towards the actions agreed to in this MOU to the CLA dean, the Vice Provost for Academic Programs, and the Director of Program Review and Assessment. A comprehensive self-study will be due June 2025 for a 2025-2026 Academic Year review process; 3) Update the AMST website to reflect current and complete program information; 4) The Program will develop a clear and explicit RTP process for Drs. Gomer and Sharma (and any future tenure-track hires) which identifies criteria for performance and specifically identifies a qualified Program committee; 5) The Program will collaborate with ATLAS to determine how they may bring majors into the program sooner, which would in turn reduce time to graduation, and 6) The Program will coordinate with the College to develop and implement a strategy addressing the implications of growth in curricula offerings and the potential hiring of new faculty.

The program has created a mission statement and program learning outcomes (PLOs). It also



successfully guided its first tenure-track faculty member through the RTP process after establishing RTP procedures. The Program conducted research into migration patterns into the major to address time-to-graduation concerns. The program website still requires updating, and the program can improve consistency in conducting annual assessments.

Resources reviewed for the report:

1. Self-study received August 2025
2. External review September 2025
3. Previous MOU 2021 (for a 2017-18 review)
4. Department website and catalog

Strengths were identified in the reports.

1. **Faculty.** Dr. Brett Mizelle, who is based in the History Department, serves as the AMST Program Director and receives six units of reassigned time for this role. The American Studies Program hired its first tenure-track faculty member in Fall 2016, who subsequently earned tenure. Since the last program review, the program hired an additional tenure-track faculty member in Fall 2019. Having two full-time tenured/tenure-track faculty dedicated to the program has allowed the program to rethink and revise the current curriculum as well as expand its general education and major course offerings. As of Spring 2025, the program had a ratio of approximately 1 tenure-track faculty member to 28 majors. The program also offers extracurricular activities that foster student community, including cultural walking tours, alumni panels supported through the Scholarly Intersections Grants (SIG) program, lecture series, and film screenings.
2. **Class offering.** AMST now offers a greater number of courses than at the time of the previous review. However, it is unclear from the self-study how the Program has coordinated with the College to develop and implement a strategy addressing the implications of growth in curricular offerings.
3. **Headcount and FTES.** Between 2018 and 2024, AMST averaged 73 majors and pre-majors. Over this period, headcount declined from 97 students in Fall 2017 to 48 students in Fall 2024. Despite this decline, the program's FTES has remained relatively stable during the review period. Many students who are not majors enroll in AMST courses, including the program's 13 AMST minor students. As of August 25, 2025, the program generated 80.4 FTES.
4. **Graduation Rates and Time to Graduation.** Among 16 first-time, first-year (FTFY) students enrolled between Fall 2015 and Fall 2023, the one-year persistence rate averaged 85.7%, which is comparable to the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) rate of 88.3%. The four-year graduation rate for AMST students was 60%, slightly higher than the CLA



average of 52.9%. The six-year graduation rate was 87.5%, also higher than the CLA average of 74.7%. Because AMST enrolls relatively few incoming FTFY students, these figures should be interpreted with caution.

Although many students discover American Studies later in their academic careers, the overall time to degree has improved substantially, declining from 7.0 years in 2017-2018 to 4.7 years in 2023-2024. The average time to graduation during the three-year period beginning in 2021-2022 (4.6-4.7 years) matches the College of Liberal Arts average of 4.7 years. AMST students graduate with an average of 127 units earned, which is also consistent with the CLA average. These improvements reflect both the program's flexible advising approach, in collaboration with ATLAS, and the development of the AMST 499 Directed Studies course. This course allows students to pursue projects not covered in the existing curriculum while supporting timely graduation when regularly scheduled courses are unavailable.

5. **DFW rates.** In Fall 2024, the overall DFW rate in AMST courses was 5.69%, and in Spring 2025 it remained essentially the same at 5.61%. The only course in AY 2024-2025 with a DFW rate above 10% was AMST 142. These data are discussed during AMST program meetings, where faculty collaborate with the program director to identify and address contributing factors. DFW rates in fully online classes (primarily sections of AMST 350 and AMST 360) have decreased. Faculty continue to monitor student retention and success in AMST 300, which serves as the gateway course to the American Studies major and minor. The program has also worked with teaching faculty to address higher DFW rates in AMST 419 and AMST 426, which have exceeded 15% over the past five years
6. **Undergraduate FTFY Equity gaps.** Equity gaps in GE courses were slightly larger for some student groups but were not statistically significant (less than half of a GPA point). In terms of gender, women outperformed men in eight of ten courses, with none of the observed equity gaps exceeding one-third of a GPA point. Although AMST enrolls a higher proportion of Black students than the university overall, the persistence and graduation rates for Black students meet university expectations. AMST faculty also monitor the slightly below-average persistence rate observed among white students.
7. **High Impact Practices (HIPs).** AMST offers a range of high-impact learning opportunities, including field trips to historic sites, museums, and Puvungna; service-learning activities; and community partner guest speakers in courses (e.g., AMST 399). Students are also invited to participate in program-sponsored community-building events, including student-faculty mixers, walking tours of downtown Los Angeles and Long Beach, and scholarly lectures and discussions. Dr. Sharma regularly collaborates with community-based organizations to bring partners to campus, exposing students to research justice initiatives and community engagement work.
8. **Facilities and Resources.** Since the last program review, AMST faculty have received training in several "smart" classrooms on campus. Faculty have also adopted new



pedagogical tools, such as Perusall, to increase student engagement through collaborative learning. The program has purchased digital recording equipment that enables students to produce video projects and podcasts in American Studies courses. In addition, many courses engage students in photovoice projects that collect student and community images and narratives to support community-informed knowledge production.

### **Concerns were noted in the reports**

No major concerns were identified in either the self-study or the external review report..

### **Opportunities for Development were noted in the reports**

The reports identified several opportunities for program development.

1. **Program Website.** The AMST Program has a mission statement and Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) that are clearly posted on the program website. The PLOs are measurable and appropriate for the discipline. However, the website is outdated and should be updated to reflect current faculty and other program changes. It would also benefit students if the website included clearer links or information related to the program of study, such as program requirements and recommended course sequences.
2. **Transfer student Graduation Rates and Time to Graduation.** The program has a 43.3% two-year and 59.1% four-year graduation rate for transfer students, significantly lower than the corresponding CLA rates of 55.3% and 81.9%. The program averages approximately 14 transfer majors entering each fall, and the majority of these incoming transfer students are student-athletes. The lower graduation rates for transfer students largely reflect the fact that many of these students matriculate at other institutions to continue competing in their sports. Some students remain enrolled in the major to maintain athletic eligibility but stop taking courses once their athletic season ends or leave the university after completing their final year of competition. Addressing this issue can be challenging because many of these students leave the area to pursue professional athletic opportunities.
3. **Student Recruitment.** Because the program's courses are primarily upper-division, many students encounter AMST relatively late in their college careers. Increasing the program's visibility among new first-time, first-year (FTFY) and transfer students could help address this challenge. The program may consider expanding its General Education course offerings and developing additional courses aligned with interdisciplinary and community-based initiatives such as Black Long Beach, Beach XP, and BALA. The program could also expand the interdisciplinary curriculum by developing additional cross-listed courses within both GE and the major. Additional recruitment strategies may include hosting regular, well-publicized advising open houses where students can meet with advisors and learn about the program,



participating in college-wide outreach events at local community colleges, and organizing alumni career panels in which former students discuss how AMST prepared them for their careers and provide professional guidance to current students. Continued development of promotional materials, such as updated pamphlets, a refreshed website, and expanded outreach activities, may also support recruitment to both the major and minor.

4. **Assessment.** Formal assessment activities were conducted regularly in the years following the previous program review in 2017. However, program-level assessment activities paused during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program conducted an assessment of a signature assignment (the AMST 498 reflective essay) in AY 2021-2022. The program is now returning to regularly scheduled formal assessment activities, beginning with an evaluation of student learning related to the application of American Studies methodologies in final projects in AMST 300.

The program has also assessed student communication using student work from AMST 498 and AMST 467. Faculty used the results of this direct assessment to identify areas for improvement and to develop strategies to strengthen students' written communication skills.

In addition, Dr. Mizelle has participated in the Data Fellows and President's and Provost's Leadership Fellows programs to analyze patterns of attrition, retention, and student migration within discovery majors such as American Studies.

5. **Strengthen Program Operations.** The AMST Program would benefit from developing formal governing documents (such as bylaws or a program constitution) to support program continuity. Establishing an American Studies Advisory Board could also provide valuable feedback from community stakeholders. In addition, the program may wish to hold more frequent, regularly scheduled program meetings that include lecturer faculty. The role of affiliated faculty should also be clarified and formalized, both on the program website and in day-to-day operations, with respect to their contributions to program development and growth.

### **Recommendations:**

It is therefore agreed that the American Studies program will collaborate with the College of Liberal Arts and Academic Affairs to:

1. Continue implementing the program's comprehensive assessment plan and conduct annual assessments using both direct and indirect assessments. The program will report on closing-the-loop activities to demonstrate how student learning outcomes data are used to inform program improvements and decision-making. The program will provide an annual update (due September 1) on progress toward the actions outlined in this MOU to the CLA Dean, the Vice Provost for Academic Programs, and the Coordinator for



Assessment. The next review cycle will run from 2025 to 2032. A comprehensive self-study will be due in September 2032 for the 2032-2033 academic year review process. (*Opportunity 4*).

2. Ensure that the program website is current, including updated content and functional links, to support student recruitment and retention (*Opportunity 1*).
3. Develop a plan to address transfer student graduation rates and time-to-degree outcomes (*Opportunity 2*).
4. Continue efforts to strengthen student recruitment to the major and minor (*Opportunity 3*).
5. Continue development and implementation of plans that strengthen program operations and governance structures (*Opportunity 5*).
6. The Program will coordinate with the College to develop and implement a strategy addressing the implications of growth in curricular offerings and the potential hiring of new faculty.

This MOU has been read and approved by:

Program Director for American Studies: Brett Mizelle  
Interim Dean for the College of Liberal Arts: Daniel O'Connor  
Vice Provost for Academic Programs: Pei-Fang Hung

\*DocuSign signature page on file