

Department of Latin American and Latino Studies, Lehman College
Evaluators' Report
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Dr. Victoria Stone-Cadena (Yale University) and Dr. Zaire Dinzey-Flores (Rutgers University) visited Lehman College on April 9, 2024 to observe and gather information as outside evaluators for the Department of Latin American and Latino Studies. Throughout the day, they met with faculty (tenured and adjunct), students (BA), administrators and staff, and visited the department offices and classrooms. They were asked to identify areas of strength, areas in need of improvement, and to offer recommendations for the department and in the context of the college. The observations, recommendations, and evaluation were developed from formal and informal meetings, class observations, and a review of the Department's 2023-2024 Self-Study, which allowed them to gain a fuller and more accurate picture of the Department's needs, goals, and vision for the future.

The evaluators' report is organized in four main sections 1) Overall observations and assessment of the department, 2) Class observations, 3) Meetings and review of programs and goals, and 4) Department strengths, opportunities for improvement, and recommendations.

1) Overall observations and assessment of department

The Department of Latin American and Latino Studies (LALS) was established as the first and ONLY Puerto Rican Studies Department in 1969, and as one of the first two ethnic studies departments in the United States (the other being Chicano Studies at California State College, Los Angeles, established in 1967). The department's distinctive fifty-five year history at Lehman is a testament to the evolving and dynamic ways that ethnic studies departments effectively attend to fluctuating student demographics and shifting needs, while remaining robust and integral to the academic mission of the university. The latter point is underscored by a fifteen-percentage increase in LALS majors over the past academic year despite a general decline in enrollment across the college and university.

The scholarship and teaching of the LALS department faculty is impressive. Widely recognized in their respective fields, the faculty serve as experienced and knowledgeable resources for the broad student population at Lehman and are a boon for the department and the college. Department faculty have published award winning books in the fields of History, Anthropology, and Latin American Studies, established nationally recognized research centers, and won national research grants that support student advancement. Their research expertise lends to the depth and breadth of course offerings while also presenting students with the opportunity to learn rigorous research and writing skills. Despite their accolades as researchers and teachers, the retirement of two fully tenured faculty, who have not yet been replaced, has created undue strain on the ability of current faculty to effectively balance teaching necessary for the major and minor requirements, to mentor and advise a growing number of student majors, and to continue to produce scholarship and innovative programming that benefits the whole university.

Assessment of current curricula and organization of the department

- Majors (Latin American Studies and Latino Studies) and Minors (Latin American Studies, Latino Studies, and Mexican and Mexican American Studies)
- Majors can be pursued fully online, in a hybrid format, or fully in-person
- Recent revision of major and minor requirements to be in line with other programs across the college: included reducing electives so that the majors are 27 credits, not 36 (without reducing any requirements), and merging Latin American and Caribbean minor with Latino Studies minor into Latin American and Latino Studies minor, to facilitate student progress to degree and encourage students to pursue double majors.
- Latino Studies Certificate Program (trilingual in English, Spanish, and Portuguese)
- Hyfield Courses - additional course offerings planned
- Future plans – additional certificate programs (Latinx Arts and Cultural Administration, Latino Health, and Latin American Business)

The department at time of observation

- Seven tenure line faculty; four of which are Associate Professors, three are full Professors
- One full time lecturer, approximately eight to ten adjunct faculty
- Growth of majors – 15% over the past academic year
- Recent retirement of tenured faculty – Xavier Totti and Milagros Ricourt
- Need for tenure-track faculty
- Need for faculty line specializing in Dominican Studies, an area of strong academic interest for prospective students and current majors alike
- Innovative course and program development - hyfield and fully online certificate programs
- Recent change in department name (2018) from “Latin American, Latino and Puerto Rican Studies” to “Latin American and Latino Studies, in recognition of changing demographics of students

2) Class Observations

Latino Media LTS 353/ LAC 360, Professor Mila Burns (in-person)

For this visit, Dr. Stone-Cadena observed Professor Mila Burns' class on Latino Media. Prof. Burns led a lively discussion about current news, which served as a warm-up exercise for students to report on their research and comment on why the media portrayed that topic as it did. It was a fun exercise but also one that fostered a critical reading of the news article itself, building a necessary skill in the class. She worked through articles that students read for class, with a high level of class participation, as she also tied the articles either to previous observations that students made or previous articles they had read, while also leading them to the main critiques of the articles. What was apparent in the class was that students were engaged, keeping up with the readings, and developing critical thinking skills that were impressive. As part of the final assignment for the class, students also worked on individual research and interviews to be included in a published collection of their work at the end of the semester.

The class exemplified what many of the courses presented during the day accomplished, while teaching specific content, it also fostered key skill sets that prepared students for future professional careers; critical thinking, investigative and expository skills, as well as presentation skills based on individual research. This course met the following department and Latino Studies major objectives; 'understand Latino communities and cultures through simultaneous appreciation of their grounding in Latin America and the Caribbean and their relationship to the United States, and conduct original research on current important issues facing Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Mexico and/or other US Latino communities.

Latino Health LTS 353/ HEA 348 / LSP 353, Professor Alyshia Galvez (in-person)

Professor Dinzey-Flores visited Professor Galvez' in person course on Latino Health. The course, which included about 20 students, showcased the pedagogical virtuosity of the program; attending to the topical foci specific of the course while fostering important tangible skills and training students analytically, critically, and professionally.

Throughout the class session, Professor Galvez masterfully and disarmingly walked students through digestible steps to develop their final projects. The class began with a writing prompt on sources for the final project, followed by a sharing session. Students participated comfortably and engagingly while Professor Galvez dutifully attended to important considerations in developing a reference list: how to think about scope and breadth in gathering sources, how to determine what to exclude, how "Latino" may be defined implicitly and explicitly in searches, where might certain hard to reach sources be located, the balance between library and online

research, how to center and reassess the research questions relative to the sources, and how to use keywords and develop different search strategies. Discussion of the sources also gave way to theoretical and conceptual topical discussions on Latino health, which included a discussion on data visualization options, CDC definitions of “macrobiome” and “exposome.”

The opening exercise gave way to an impressive interactive workshop on the politics and management of referencing and citational practices. This workshop by Professor Galvez should be required for all undergraduate students. While navigating questions of what is considered important research, who is validated, plagiarism, who and how our thinking is influenced, and the affective relationships in citation (revolution, resistance, and love), Prof. Galvez taught the practical skill of how to cite using the software Zotero. Students were in awe and grateful to learn the software. Prof. Galvez managed to make a potentially tedious lesson on referencing, fun, effective, and critically engaging.

This class exhibited the instructional rigor and innovation of LAL department courses, and how it impressively bridges theoretical, conceptual, practical, and topical foci in service of its students.

The following courses were also observed during the visit. They all exemplified similar qualities, of teaching beyond content to include a broad ranging analytic and research skills, and clearly met the standards set forth in the curriculum goals.

- Latino Family and Gender LTS 232, Professor María Hernandez (online synchronous)
- Black Feminisms LAC 310, Professor Sarah Ohmer (online asynchronous)

3) Meetings and review of programs and goals

Summary

During lunch and throughout the afternoon, Dr. Stone-Cadena and Dr. Dinzey-Flores met with professors, students, staff, and administrators. These meetings included: Jorge Silva Puras, Interim Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Success, Olena Zhadko, Senior Director of the Center for Teaching & Learning, Office of the Provost; Professors Mila Burns, Magdalena Sagardia, David Badillo, and Sarah Ohmer; Alyshia Galvez, Interim Department Chair, Teresita Levy, Interim Dean of Arts and Humanities, Veronica Mason, Senior Administrator of the Department, and several students.

During the lunch meeting, students reflected on the first class that they took in LALS, what they found compelling about it, and how the faculty within the department helped support them on their academic career path. This was often expressed as a moment of personal empowerment, a powerful recognition that Latinos have and bring value to the ‘room’ and are worthy in the

pursuit of, and as the subject of, academic research. Their powerful, compelling accounts of varying paths to LAL, underscores the central role of LAL for Lehman students, particularly students of color, Latine and Latin American students, as well as non-traditional students. The reflections by the students resonated with both Dr. Dinzey-Flores and Dr. Stone-Cadena, similar to what students in their respective departments express. This validation for primarily first generation Latin-American and Latino students should never be undervalued. It represents a critical juncture in the academic career path of students, that is brought up in family conversations about their own trajectories and their communities at large, embedding the academic institution in its community and highlighting the importance of public educational institutions as mediators of social change. It also clearly showcases that LAL has expertly developed the essential features necessary for academic success of Latino/Latin American, first generation, and students of color. The critical role of the department in fostering this connection for generations of students was recognized throughout the day and further emphasized in conversation with Provost Silva Puras.

Faculty presented on areas of department growth as well as the challenges that they faced as faculty and in the program. The students at the meeting were primarily first generation college students, and spoke about their student experiences while also being care-takers, full-time workers, transfer students, and veterans. The students were thinking about future careers in politics, arts, and social work.

Hyfield Courses

- Presented by Prof. Sagardía
- Impressive and innovative goal of practical learning through community engagement through site visits with cultural institutions
- Visit to Puerto Rico over winter session - a great success
- Leverages social capital of professor - depth of access dependent on their networks
- Value for students who are veterans, hands on learning a great opportunity to re-enter the academic space, credits applicable for program in the Veteran's office
- Successfully indexes career paths in community and art sector
- Still need to fine-tune funding availability so the cost of transportation and museum admission is fully covered - while available, students had paid some costs themselves
- Further clarification of time commitment (including travel time to locations) being mindful of work schedules and care-taking commitments
- This module works particularly well to achieve the learning goals of both the Latin American and Latino Studies majors, to “show competence in the artistic expressions of Latin American and the Caribbean, as well as among Latino communities in the United States”
- This module also presents the opportunity to forge new collaborations with nearby institutions such as the New York Botanical Garden

- Likewise, the course helps visibilize the value of local community through interactions with museums, galleries and public institutions
- The boundaries of education are expansive as it reaches beyond the students to their families and communities.

Latino Studies Certificate (trilingual)

- Presented by Prof. Burns
- An impressive trilingual, fully online, certificate program aimed at creating a pipeline for students who may have some credentials from Latin American institutions and are interested in pursuing a degree at a U.S. based institution
- Funding comes primarily from tuition and the program is supported by Continuing Education in conjunction with the department
- Like the fully matriculated majors and minors, faculty advising and mentorship is a huge component of this program
- Recommend adding a module for advisement per semester. This might help manage student expectations and also compensate faculty for additional workload.
- Incredible lift to design, prepare, and implement the program in three languages.
- Expands the boundaries of the university for a wider reach, and invites new populations into the university.

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), MALS, and Assessment

- Presented by Prof. Ohmer
- A long-standing program at CUNY, the programmatic scope of the WAC on the Lehman campus is robust and well developed
- An extensive pedagogical self-reflection and review of the program and its objectives and impact focused the curriculum's forte and impact.
- Involvement of graduate students and faculty in anti-racist pedagogical practices through redesigning classes and syllabus development
- Year long programming with opportunities for peer-review particularly impressive, reading lab
- Graduate students are given opportunity to develop a teaching statement and engage in praxis - will be very helpful when entering the job market
- MALS - seniors in the department can take credit-courses that count towards the MA
- In development, students able to pursue a BA and MA as a combined academic pathway

Recent Hire of Full-Time Lecturer

- Presented by Prof. Badillo
- Shared insight on the recent faculty search. The department was strategic and intentional in its search efforts to adhere to best practice hiring guidelines to minimize biases or other

forms of inequities at all stages of the search process. Through the hiring process, they identified and successfully hired a candidate in the full time lecturer position.

We also discussed and were impressed by the well developed online course options as well as the opportunities opened up by funding from the BRESI Initiative. We learned about the efforts to strengthen the pipeline to graduate school, with a focus on The Graduate Center and the role of the Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies (CLACLS) in providing full fellowships to two LALS graduate students. The department noted the challenge of developing a community post-pandemic, and with a fully online contingent of student majors.

4) Department strengths, opportunities for improvement, and recommendations

Areas of strength:

- Student retention and completion of degree - more information and tracking of student completion would help highlight strengths of the department
- Metrics of success – beyond student completion, includes skill sets and overall community impact. Students are learning more than content in these courses, they are learning skills that are transferable to their future success as community engaged, critically thinking global citizens. The critical interpretation of texts, historical and contemporary, media and news outlets, and public discourse are skills cultivated in all of the courses listed in the department's curriculum.
- Excellent, rigorous and innovative curriculum that includes effective pedagogical practices and programming, especially attuned to non-traditional, multi-lingual, first-generation students, community-engaged, and students of color.
- Many of the programmatic innovations are mirrored across the university, making it a pioneering program of critical importance.
- Self-assessment and reevaluation of program structure – as outlined in the 2023-2024 Self Study Report – well thought out structure and set of goals with clear parameters and metrics
- With four Associate Professors, two Professors, and a Distinguished Professor, the department is uniquely prepared to successfully hire and mentor a cohort of junior faculty. Alongside the academic interests of students, the department also increased the number of majors by 15% in the last year, a trend which is likely to continue given their latest efforts.
- Internships– what can a student do with a LALS degree? Impressive range of internship opportunities that reflects another department strength, of taking into account the whole student and their future opportunities and the translatability of the skills cultivated in the program.
- Value to campus and community at large should be continually recognized and promoted.

- It is clear that the professors in the department not only teach classes, they work as mentors and advisors for the students, taking additional responsibilities in shepherding students into career paths, some professional and others in graduate school trajectories. The professors speak about their students as whole individuals, and likewise attend to them as such, being mindful of the range of responsibilities that the student juggles while attending school.

Areas for improvement:

- At an institutional level, the department is constrained by the need for additional full time, ladder track faculty, to meet the demand of students and to fully realize the potential of the program.
- Communal spaces – as many students commute to campus, there is a clear need for communal workspaces, especially if group work is required for a class, in the building. It was pointed out that furniture was removed from the hallways which used to serve as small gathering spaces.
- Questions about equity and sustained workload - programmatic efforts across the department, while lending to the excellence of the department, seem woefully undercompensated and could lead to burn out. This is a matter to be discussed with the administration about innovative ways to support a more balanced workload.

Recommendations based on observations and stated goals of the department:

- With the growth of the number of majors and the recent retirements of two senior faculty, the department is primed for a cluster hire of at least 3 more faculty - to replace two recently retired faculty, Prof. Xavier Totti and Prof. Milagros Ricourt, and a third to expand scholarship in the department. We would recommend that the department consider partnering with other departments for a dual-appointment (with very clear guidelines for the anticipated tenure process) for which student engagement would be mutually beneficial, perhaps in the anticipated certificate areas.
- Latino Studies Certificate program - would benefit from a titled program coordinator as it grows and develops, a faculty person could take this on but would require at least one course release per semester and additional summer salary if applicable.
- Hyfield course - given the time commitment for these courses, it would be reasonable to recognize the effort as a four-credit course to offset the teaching load over the course of the year.
- As a commuter campus, common space for student meetings and group work is critical. The formerly furnished hallways should be repurposed with comfortable seating areas at minimum. Ideally the department should be granted access to a large communal lounge area for activities, programming, and student gatherings.