

Academic Program Review for the UNM Latin American Studies program November 20, 2007

Introduction

The APR review team for the Latin American Studies program, consisting of John Lipski (Pennsylvania State University), Cary Morrow (UNM, Chemistry), Ken Roberts (Cornell University), and Marianne Schmink (University of Florida) conducted a site visit on November 14-16, 2007. During the visit the team met with LAS faculty, LAS graduate students, curators of UNM's Latin American library collection, and members of the UNM higher administration. The team wishes to thank all those responsible for making the visit both efficient and satisfying. The LAS program has a highly enthusiastic faculty, support staff, and student body committed to maintaining the excellence of this UNM flagship program.

Everyone with whom we met was open and candid about all aspects of the LAS program, and to the extent we probed, the LAII and the relationship between the two. Both LAS and the LAII, and through them, the University as a whole and the State of New Mexico are the beneficiaries of an incredibly talented group of faculty who have dedicated a significant fraction of their academic careers to the success of the two entities. This was especially brought home by the fact that the membership of ICLAS, the committee which oversees LAS, significantly overlaps the membership of LAII's Executive Committee. The relationship between LAS and LAII is complex. Probably as a result of historical leveraging of the state funds that had been committed to the LAS to get the LAII research institute started, the LAII seems to have become the senior partner in the relationship with the LAS program then receiving benefit from funding brought into the LAII in lieu of having a budget of its own. This unusual relationship in which the research institute is partially funded with state funds while the academic entity, LAS, depends on soft money coming into LAII was viable so long as the LAII was successful in bringing in the required soft funds. The fragile nature of this relationship was driven home recently when a key Title VI grant was lost.

LAS benefits from the dedicated service of its director, Kimberly Gauderman, and appears to have had a succession of similarly talented and dedicated directors prior to Kimberly's taking the position. The review team was distressed to see how Kimberly's talents and energy were wasted during the past year trying to raise a few thousand dollars to meet commitments to the LAS GA's and to prepare for and meet its commitments to this review process. This is an inappropriate response to the needs of a program which has benefited the University for so many years, which is one of the unique strengths of the University, which has been a component of all recent University long range plans, and which has been made a UNM legislative priority at the request of the Governor.

The remainder of this report is structured in the following manner. After an overview of major strengths and potential risks to the LAS program, the four questions that were explicitly posed to the review team will be addressed individually. Some additional observations and recommendations will complete the report.

LAS program strengths

- The LAS program is a long-standing, nationally-recognized academic program with excellent faculty leadership and staff, an active and dedicated faculty from a diversity of departments and colleges across the campus, and an exceptionally strong library collection.
- The LAS program enjoys strong support from collaborating departments, attracts excellent graduate students who would be competitive in other nationally-established LAS programs, and graduates the largest number of Master's students of any program in the College of Arts and Sciences.
- LAS also serves as an effective feeder to the Ph.D. programs of a number of affiliated departments, thus strengthening these departments' recruitment efforts and enhancing the quality of their doctoral programs.

The APR took place at a unique moment when the program faces new risks, and also special opportunities to address these risks and consolidate this strong program, at relatively low cost to UNM.

Risks to the continued excellence of LAS

- The recent loss of Title VI funding for the LAII from the Department of Education revealed the precarious funding base of the LAS program: a degree-granting unit that depends entirely on soft funds.
- The LAS program currently has no autonomous institutional resources, either funding or facilities, relying completely on budgets from other units.
- The LAS Director's time is spent almost entirely on negotiations with other units on campus in order to cover the program's basic operating costs, making it nearly impossible to implement needed program development and recruitment efforts, as identified in previous program reviews.
- Available LAS graduate student stipends may support only 2-3 students out of 40-50 applicants next year.
- LAS core teaching programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels rely on faculty from affiliate departments, who may not be replaced if other departmental and college demands compete for these lines.
- A weakened LAS program will reduce the incentives for retention of LAS faculty, who as a group are active and potentially mobile scholars.

Opportunities

- Strong statements of support from the state government (Governor and Higher Education Secretary) for Latin American initiatives.
- A promising Legislative Budget Request and "special request" list.
- Statement of support from the new dean of Arts & Sciences, and from the Provost's office, for international, interdisciplinary programs, and specifically for the LAS program.
- Importance of international, interdisciplinary programs such as LAS for upcoming UNM accreditation and efforts to achieve AAU status.

Question #1: What recommendations can you offer to both LAS and university administration regarding appropriate recurring financial support for the program?

A continuing budget that does not depend on soft funding is absolutely essential to the continuing health of the program. The impact of the recent loss of the soft funds through which LAS has traditionally been supported, and the difficulty that the Director of LAS has had in finding substitute funding highlight the unnecessarily precarious fiscal position of this outstanding, internationally known program. The following we feel are the minimum resources that should be provided in LAS' recurring budget:

- The Director of LAS should be assured of the means of support that are standard for department chairs in the College of Arts and Sciences: a two-course buy-out (at the level such buyouts would be made in a disciplinary department in A&S), an administrative SAC, and a summer SAC or salary support, plus a discretionary supply and expense budget. This would free up the LAS Director's time to implement program development efforts identified in previous and current program reviews.
- Work-study salaries should be provided for two work-study students.
- We also recommend that the university consider shifting the Academic Program Manager line (with full salary and benefits) from the LAII to LAS, since this position is explicitly designed to serve the academic program.
- Three or four course buyout credits within A&S each semester should be made available to the LAS Director to ensure that key LAS courses are taught. When necessary, one of these course buyout credits should be available for use outside of A&S.
- Ultimately, the LAS budget from state funds should be adequate for it to be able to thrive independently of the LAII. This budget should probably be housed in A&S with the understanding that, at some time in the future, the LAS Director might well not be in A&S for a few years.

Question #2: How might the LAS program better assess student outcomes, especially in light of the interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum?

We were of two minds with regard to this issue. At first the reaction was that a portfolio for the relatively small number of undergraduate students completing degrees in LAS coupled with an exit interview or survey could be evaluated adequately by the faculty associated with the program. Collection of data on post-graduation employment and, perhaps, a follow-up survey on adequacy of the preparation provided for the career chosen could be used. As the review process progressed, frustration was expressed with the lack of a clear vision from the central administration as to what appropriate assessment would include. Readily forthcoming from the administration is guidance as to what is NOT appropriate, such as classroom testing, analysis of research papers, and for graduate students the comprehensive examination, i.e., all of the things faculty view as assessing student learning in a course. However there is little guidance as to what would satisfactorily substitute for these familiar measures.

The team recommends that the UNM central administration provide all units that are required to implement outcomes assessment clear and explicit guidelines as to the sorts of measures that are

appropriate, and when possible that examples of successful approved outcomes assessment strategies be provided to units requesting such guidance. These guidelines must be adapted to the special needs and challenges of an interdisciplinary program like LAS, whose students take a broad range of non-standardized courses from diverse disciplines. In the absence of a standardized course sequence, students graduate from the program with diverse and often individualized skill sets that require flexible instruments to assess.

Question #3. What recommendations do you have regarding how Latin American Studies might be included in the University's core curriculum?

- Given its geographic location, demographic composition, and strategic priorities, the university should incorporate lower-level LAS courses into its core curriculum for undergraduate students. Some existing courses in the History department are clearly appropriate for inclusion in the core curriculum (e.g. Hist 281, History of Early Latin American and Hist 282 Modern Latin American History).
- We also recommend that the university provide the modest course buy-out support needed for departments to release LAS-affiliated faculty to develop an interdisciplinary introductory course in Latin American Studies (which could also be appropriate for the core curriculum). Such a course would provide a common intellectual foundation for LAS majors and minors, and it would greatly enhance the recruitment of undergraduates into the LAS major, which we see as a major priority of the undergraduate program.

Question #4. Should the Ph.D. in Latin American Studies continue to be offered at UNM?

- We do not see a compelling case for the value-added of the Ph.D. program. Although there are a handful of students who seek such interdisciplinary degrees, and a small number of (generally non-academic) positions for which students with these degrees may qualify, we do not believe there is a market that is unique to these qualifications. In short, students with a disciplinary degree and a Latin American concentration can readily qualify for any position that might be open to a student with the interdisciplinary Ph.D. As such, we do not think the program would be diminished by eliminating this degree option, and it would save some administrative costs. If the program opts to maintain this degree option, we recommend that it be redesigned to target a very small number of experienced, mid-career professionals who have decided that they need a specialized but interdisciplinary doctoral program. A look back at the Ph.D.'s that have been awarded over the past ten years with an eye to what kind of alternative program might have met their needs could be helpful. If most recent students were just "marking time" there does not seem to be a compelling reason to continue it.

LAS Program and Curriculum

- At the graduate level, a gateway interdisciplinary course, preferably team-taught, would also enrich the intellectual experience of students and enhance the interdisciplinary (rather than multi-disciplinary) character of the program.
- We recommend that graduate students be allowed to get LAS credit for a methods course in one of their areas of concentration. Methods training is crucial for many students who

will be conducting research during or after their degree programs, particularly those who plan to write a thesis.

- Given that courses with Latin American content are scheduled by individual departments, there is no guaranteed consistency in the number, level, and breadth of courses available to LAS students from semester to semester. We recommend that when circumstances so dictate, the discretionary funds recommended for the LAS directorship be used for buy-outs to ensure that key courses are offered.

Graduate student support and advising

The graduate students with whom we met seem to be excellent. They are the kind of students we, as faculty, are always seeking, for each seemed to be dedicated to a personal educational passion rather than simply seeking a credential. Among the things we learned from the students was that nearly all had applied to and been accepted by other programs around the country and had chosen UNM over other options (including the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Arizona, Georgetown University, and the University of Colorado). Most indicated that the financial aid offer from UNM was one of the best that they received, and clearly that played a role—but not a dominant one—in the decision to attend UNM. Other factors that were prominently mentioned were the faculty with whom they would be studying, the library resources, and the availability of the combined MALAS/Law degree programs and concentrations in Human Rights. However, the single factor mentioned most was the personal attention that Amanda Wolfe, the LAS Academic Program Manager, had given them during the application process.

GA-ships assigned to LAS involve mostly clerical tasks within the LAII. The team feels that this is not an appropriate use of scarce resources and does not add to the professional preparation of graduate students. The following recommendations are offered:

- That GA lines be administered directly by LAS rather than being transferred from LAII.
- That holders of GA-ships be assigned appropriate research or teaching duties consistent with their areas of research. For example making research assistants available to LAS faculty members on a competitive basis would provide a considerable incentive for continued participation in the program and would provide students with valuable discipline-related research experience.

Several graduate students described problems dealing with the administrative details of dual-degree programs, particularly those involving LAS and the Law School. Typical difficulties involve decisions as to which courses count for each program, glitches in registration and record-keeping that incorrectly report student status as regards progress toward degree, and lack of readily available information regarding the best strategies for combining coursework in both programs. The following recommendations are offered:

- That a concise written document be prepared that provides explicit information on the logistics of dual-degree programs, with reference to specific program requirements.
- That specific liaison personnel be designated in the appropriate colleges and professional schools and in OGS, and that constant communication be maintained with LAS advisors.

- That advisors recommend that LAS/Law dual-degree students take their comprehensive exams in LAS before beginning their coursework in the Law School.
- That relevant student experiences in pursuing dual-degree programs be compiled and made available to students contemplating such a program.

Additional recommendations

In addition to these responses to the specific questions raised by our charge, the committee also offers the following recommendations.

- The LAS program is encouraged to initiate a development effort for creation of a Director's account in the Foundation that is independent of the LAII Director's account. The College and University should provide resources for this effort initially, but it should become self-sustaining.
- Although we were not charged to evaluate the LAII, we are aware of concerns regarding the leadership transition. The resources provided by the LAII are important to the stability of the LAS faculty, the best of whom are highly mobile and could be lost if the LAII is not stabilized in a timely fashion. It is therefore important for the administration to support efforts to reestablish a stable leadership. The LAII Executive Committee consists of a very capable group of individuals who have the best interests of the LAII, rather than personal interests, at heart. Should the option of a rotating LAII directorship emerge as the preferable option, there are several eminently qualified mid-career faculty members who would be appropriate candidates. The review team urges all those involved in the decision-making process not to allow consideration of specific past and present personalities to overshadow the long history of achievements of both LAS and the LAII.

Panoramic summary of recommendations

- *Administrative Support:* The university needs to financially secure the directorship of LAS. This is a high-priority objective, and it is one that can be achieved with a very modest commitment of financial resources. At a minimum, this requires that the Director of LAS be assured of the means of support that are standard for department chairs in the College of Arts and Sciences: a two-course buy-out, an administrative SAC, and a summer SAC or salary support, plus a discretionary supply and expense budget. Additional course buy-outs should be made available to ensure that basic LAS offerings are available on a regular basis. We also recommend that the university consider shifting the Academic Program Manager line from the LAII to the LAS, since this position is explicitly designed to serve the academic unit.
- *Graduate Assistants:* GA lines that are designated for LAS students should belong to the LAS as the academic unit that screens, admits, and places the students. We see no reason for these awards to pass through the LAII. We also recommend that the LAS and/or LAII seek work study support for the office and clerical tasks that are often performed by GA's, so that the latter can be freed to perform more substantive, research-oriented roles that are integrated into their academic training. GA's could, for example, be assigned to work with affiliated faculty on research projects. This would foster collaborative

research, enhance the GA experience, and allow LAS to provide tangible support to faculty from diverse academic units that devote substantial time and energy to the LAS program. The university should also seek resources to expand the number of GA lines and augment their stipends to make them more competitive with the awards offered by peer institutions. Although LAS has been successful in recruiting high-caliber graduate students, its recruitment efforts are clearly hampered by the small number of awards it can offer and the modest financial support they provide.

- *Curriculum Development:* Given its geographic location, demographic composition, and strategic priorities, the university should incorporate lower-level LAS courses into its core curriculum for undergraduate students. Several existing courses in the History department are clearly appropriate for inclusion in the core curriculum. We also recommend that the university provide the modest course buy-out support needed for departments to release LAS-affiliated faculty to develop an interdisciplinary introductory course in Latin American Studies (which could also be appropriate for the core curriculum). Finally, we recommend that graduate students be allowed to get LAS credit for a methods course in one of their areas of concentration.
- *LAS Ph.D. Program:* We do not see a compelling case for the value-added of the Ph.D. program. Although there are a handful of students who seek such interdisciplinary degrees, and a small number of (generally non-academic) positions for which students with these degrees may qualify, we do not believe there is a market that is unique to these qualifications. In short, students with a disciplinary degree and a Latin American concentration can readily qualify for any position that might be open to a student with the interdisciplinary Ph.D. As such, we do not think the program would be diminished by eliminating this degree option, and it would save some administrative costs. If the program opts to maintain this degree option, we recommend that it be redesigned to target a very small number of experienced, mid-career professionals who have decided that they need a specialized but interdisciplinary doctoral program.
- *Outcomes Assessment:* The team recommends that the UNM central administration provide all units that are required to implement outcomes assessment clear and explicit guidelines as to the sorts of measures that are appropriate, and when possible that examples of successful approved outcomes assessment strategies be provided to units requesting such guidance.