

Request to Establish a Ph.D. and Master of Arts in American Studies at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill

Introduction

Following a recommendation from the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs approved in January 2010 the request from UNC – Chapel Hill to plan a doctoral program in American Studies. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill now seeks approval to establish Ph.D. and Master of Arts in American Studies programs (CIP 05.0102) effective June 2012.

Program Description

American Studies is a nationally and internationally recognized field, comprising the interdisciplinary study of American culture. The object of study is American culture in all its diversity, and the methodologies include historical, literary, and visual analysis as well as ethnography, sociology, economics, and political science as appropriate. The American Studies Department at UNC-CH has a distinguished faculty, including tenured and tenure-track appointments of seven full professors, seven associate professors, and three assistant professors as well as almost three dozen affiliated faculty members with primary appointments in other departments. Ongoing global collaborations have given the UNC-CH American Studies department international standing.

Since 1968, UNC-CH has offered a B.A. in American Studies. Students who graduate from this program continue to careers in a variety of fields such as business, law, teaching, public service, medicine, dentistry, journalism, theology, and music; additionally, other students have continued the study of American Studies at the graduate level at other universities and have become professors or professionals in related fields. The American Studies Department at UNC-CH currently offers graduate courses and a graduate minor in American Studies.

With this history and these resources, the American Studies Department is well-positioned to offer a unique and highly competitive graduate program. Students will take courses in American Studies and other disciplines and will develop “fields” that reflect special strengths at UNC-CH: Southern Studies, American Indian Studies, Folklore and material culture, as well as American history, literature, visual culture, ethnography, and social sciences. Graduate students will be able to focus their educational programs according to their individual interests and will be strong candidates for positions in college teaching as well as jobs in educational innovation, archives, museums, foundations, and other related fields.

The American Studies Department is already the home for UNC’s long-standing and successful MA degree in Folklore. The Folklore MA will continue to be offered. Some students who receive the Folklore MA may apply for admission to the doctoral program in American Studies, and will be evaluated for admission beside other candidates.

The American Studies graduate program will attract students with an interest in interdisciplinary research and teaching in higher education and related institutions such as museums, archives, and educational nonprofits. These students will have a background in American Studies or else one of its cognate fields: history, literary studies, folklore, ethnography, communications studies, popular culture studies, regional or ethnic studies. UNC-CH expects to attract a mix of students with special interests in areas of the program's strength such as American Indian Studies, Southern Studies, Folklore, Visual and Material Culture Studies, documentary studies, as well as literary and cultural history. The doctoral program will offer a mix of coursework, teaching opportunities, and internships designed to promote interdisciplinary discoveries in the study of American cultures and train young scholars in ways to disseminate their research.

All students will be admitted to the doctoral program at UNC-Chapel Hill. Applicants do not need a master's degree prior to admission in the program, but some may be accepted with an MA in hand. Students admitted with an MA in a related field such as Folklore will take some additional core courses as they progress toward the American Studies Ph.D. For students admitted without prior graduate training, the MA degree in American Studies will typically be earned at the end of the fourth semester, but students planning to earn a terminal Master's Degree will not be admitted to the program. Students will complete specified course work, produce a capstone project, present a Teaching Portfolio, take comprehensive examinations, defend a dissertation prospectus, and write and defend a Ph.D. thesis. UNC – Chapel Hill anticipates that all requirements can be completed by the end of the student's fifth year.

This would be the only doctoral program in American Studies in the University of North Carolina and in the state. It would be a relatively small program, admitting only five students per year, with a goal of 25 total students on an ongoing basis.

Educational Goals

The educational goals of the proposed program are as follows:

- Provide rigorous training in interdisciplinary methods dedicated to the understanding of the complex cultures and history of the United States and its place in the world;
- Emphasize the ability to pose questions that reflect academic and professional interests and goals, and to develop analytic and pedagogical skills through individual and collaborative endeavors;
- Provide students with models of historical and critical analysis of literature and the fine arts, history, culture, and society, as well as ethnographic and theoretical tools;
- Instill proficiency in subject areas and in scholarly literature that has been central to American Studies as modes of inquiry, as public practice, and as cultural policy;
- Prepare students for their own research and scholarly writing at both the MA and PhD levels by fostering facility in the theoretical frameworks and arguments in the discipline as well as in current scholarly, critical, and ethnographic practice;
- Prepare students to teach at the college and university levels in American Studies and related fields, including Southern Studies, American Indian Studies, literature, history, art history, cultural studies, folklore and the social sciences;

- Prepare students for professional opportunities in museums, public sector, or related fields requiring interdisciplinary perspectives and methodologies;
- Familiarize students with scholarly publishing, public programming, exhibitions, and other ways to disseminate the results of their research.

Collaboration with Other Institutions

The American Studies graduate program will have collaborative relationships with related programs within the state and across the nation and the world. Collaborations with Western Carolina University have already made it possible to offer undergraduate courses in Cherokee language; conversations are under way with colleagues at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Appalachian State University about closer working ties. The UNC-CH American Studies doctoral program might be a next step for students earning their MA degrees in related departments in other UNC system programs. Collaborations with museums and other institutions throughout the state are also strong possibilities. Ongoing partnerships with American Studies programs in the U.K., Australia, Germany, and Japan will provide global opportunities for scholarly collaboration as well.

Student Demand

There is a demonstrable desire for graduate degrees in American Studies. The national professional organization, the American Studies Association (ASA), reports that numbers of students receiving a B.A. in American Studies are growing, and that the largest contingent of such graduates attends graduate school. In June 2011, the Newsletter of the ASA published its annual report on a survey of doctoral recipients in American Studies. This report found that, despite the ongoing national economic challenges, strong demand for enrollment in American Studies graduate programs continues. In the past year, the Chair of the UNC-CH American Studies Department and the Director of the Folklore M.A. in American Studies have received approximately a dozen inquiries from students hoping to apply to a Ph.D. program in American Studies that they have heard may soon be offered at UNC-CH. Roughly half of these are students who completed the MA in Folklore at UNC-CH; the remaining expressions of interest come from students completing B.A. or M.A. degrees in History, English, Southern Studies, or Appalachian Studies at other universities.

Societal Need

In addition to academic teaching positions, careers chosen by American Studies Ph.D.s include public heritage, archives and records management, cultural resource management, and public folklore. In the region, Southern Studies programs are natural destinations for American Studies Ph.D.s with a Southern Studies emphasis. An important new development is that the UNC-CH Digital Innovation Lab, located in the Department of American Studies, was launched in 2011. With a focus on public digital humanities, the Digital Innovation Lab will provide graduate students with important technological skills and training in engaging non-academic audiences in the enduring themes of American Studies scholarship. Opportunities to work on digital humanities projects and collaborations with cultural heritage organizations will help to position the Ph.D. students for both academic careers and, increasingly, jobs with museums, libraries, and other cultural heritage organizations.

External Program Review

The external review process is designed to identify strengths and weaknesses in proposed new doctoral programs. Four external reviewers of national stature found no noteworthy weaknesses in the proposed program, and reported significant strengths. Major comments from the four external reviewers are summarized below:

Reviewer 1: “The structure of the program, with subfields required of all students, important benchmarks that include a capstone project, comprehensive written and oral examinations, and a teaching portfolio, are ideally conducive to a solid grounding in the field and excellent professional development.”

Reviewer 2: “There won’t be many programs that can offer expertise in both American Indian Studies and Southern Studies and have the faculty and track record to confirm it...Such an impressive list of teaching awards bodes well for the graduate students admitted to the doctoral degree program.”

Reviewer 3: “Several senior faculty members have already established international reputations (e.g., Kasson, Allen, Ferris) and should be the type of professors prospective students from various corners of the nation and globe seek out.”

Reviewer 4: “I believe that the UNC-CH program could, almost as soon as it is launched, take its place in the top ten American Studies Ph.D. programs in the country, and within a decade, with proper funding for graduate students, become one of the top five.”

Graduate Council

As a basis for its consideration, the Graduate Council had the proposal to establish the program, complete copies of the four external reviewers’ comments, and a presentation to the Council by representatives of the program. The following topics were raised and discussed by Council members with the representatives from UNC-CH: the availability of jobs for graduates, the quality of the faculty, the fact that no new faculty positions are needed, the breadth of the curriculum areas within the program, and how the program would be supported if enrollment growth funding should not be available.

The representatives of the Department of American Studies at UNC – Chapel Hill answered all questions about the proposed programs to the satisfaction of the Council members.

Resources

Available Resources to Support the Program: The primary needs for a doctoral program in this discipline are a strong faculty and a first-rate library. UNC – Chapel Hill has both. A faculty of distinction and appropriate size for a doctoral program exists at UNC-CH. The library holdings are outstanding, with special collections such as the Southern Historical Collection, the North Carolina Collection, the Southern Folklife Collection, and the Documenting the American South digital resource project.

Funding Support for Graduate Students: Should enrollment growth funding not be available, the Department, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Graduate School have identified

and committed appropriate funding to support this program. In particular, the College of Arts and Sciences has seen and agreed to a funding plan.

The Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences pledges \$90,000 in recurring funds (from reallocation of existing instructional budget resources in the college) for graduate student support for the Ph.D. in American Studies. These funds can be accessed as soon as the program is approved and the first students enrolled. Graduate student support can be in the form of research assistants, teaching assistants, or teaching fellows. Additionally, the Office of the Dean has promised \$55,000 in non-recurring money to American Studies to support Ph.D. students. These funds are dedicated to Ph.D. students and may be utilized over time. The Department of American Studies permanent instructional budget is now just a little less than \$50,000. The Department currently uses these funds to support teaching assistants and teaching fellows in other graduate programs, but will use the allocation to support its own graduate students when the Ph.D. program is in operation. Additionally, American Studies can draw upon its carryover funds (currently \$125,000) to support graduate students in both the proposed Ph.D. and existing Folklore M.A. Doctoral students may also apply for merit assistantships and service-related assistantships administered by the Graduate School. Finally, the Department's development priorities in its signature concentrations (Southern Studies, Digital Humanities, American Indian Studies, Folklore, and Global American Studies) include an emphasis on graduate student support.

Recommendation by the Graduate Council

After consideration and discussion of the proposed programs, the Graduate Council voted, without dissent, to recommend approval for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to establish Ph.D. and Master of Arts in American Studies programs.

Recommendation

The staff of the General Administration recommends that the Board of Governors approve the request from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to establish Ph.D. and Master of Arts in American Studies programs (CIP 05.0102) effective June 2012.

Approved to be Recommended for Establishment to the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs


Suzanne T. Ortega

Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

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