December 23, 2008

From: Michael Mahoney, Provost and Vice President, Academic Affairs

To: Diedre Badejo, Dean, CLASS
Carlos Solomon, Director, Latin American Studies Program

Subject: MOU Meeting – B.A. in Latin American Studies

On December 19, 2008, I met with Deidre Badejo, Dean, CLASS; Jim Okutsu, Associate Dean, CLASS; Carlos Solomon, Director, Latin American Studies Program; Aline Soules, Chair, CAPR; and Carl Bellone, AVP Academic Programs and Graduate Studies to discuss the Program Review for the B.A. in Latin American Studies in order to develop an MOU as required by CAPR 9.

Latin American Studies (LAST) is an interdisciplinary program located in Ethnic Studies directed by Carlos Solomon, Assistant Professor of Ethnic Studies, who took over the program in 2006. Previously, it was located in History. Last year it graduated 7 majors. Currently, there are about 10 majors or and 13 minors in Latin American Studies. The number of minors has increased dramatically as the result of a curriculum change in the B.A. in Liberal Studies and increased interest from majors in Spanish and Political Science.

The Latin American Studies degree had been heavy with History courses. The program is now broadening its offering by developing courses such as Women in Latin America and Latin American Social Movements. The curricular changes mentioned in the CAPR Report have already been approved for Fall 2009 which will make it easier for students to get through the program.

The Latin American Studies program has conducted Summer Programs in Latin America for interested students. The programs are short in duration (one to two weeks) and have enrolled two to six students. Students have traveled to Mexico and Venezuela focusing on contacts with community organizations.

The Latin American Studies Program has developed a strong oral history archive and website. Currently there are 45 oral histories on the Program’s website. Resources are needed to maintain the website which currently depends upon voluntary student support. The Director is currently writing a grant to get the website translated. MATS may also be able to provide some assistance.

The program has explored the possibility of an online degree or Certificate in Latin American Studies. Since the degree is interdisciplinary, an online degree would require
the cooperation of many departments. Thus, an online certificate is more feasible in the near future. An online certificate promises to be popular with current students and with professionals in the field.

Service learning is an important component of Latin American Studies since many graduates tend to go into community organizations that work with Latin American issues. However, it is a struggle to convince students that there are jobs for majors.

The Director of the Latin American Studies Program gets one course assigned time (4 WTU) per year to coordinate the program.

Student learning outcome data is not well developed at this time.

CAPR commended the impressive and diligent efforts of Dr. Carlos Solomon on the preparation of the CAPR Report and his efforts at revitalizing a program that had suffered from lack of attention and management in the past. CAPR stated that with appropriate resources and management Latin American Studies could grow significantly. CAPR made the following specific recommendations: 1) the university should provide earmarked administrative assistance to the LAST Director for recruitment, publicity, and inter-departmental liaison activities; 2) the university should considered assigned time for the Director to develop/revise LAST’s dated curriculum; and 3) the university should increase the LAST Director’s budget to an appropriated and sufficient level so that all planned actions can be properly carried out.

The results of the MOU meeting are as follows:

1. The Latin American Studies program should work with the CLASS Office to promote the program in order to generate more FTES. Resources including earmarked administrative assistance are tied to student enrollment. The program needs to show growth that will justify increased resources. Growth may come through a strategic development plan that focuses on the programs strengths such as the oral history project, study abroad opportunities, and emphasis on the language and culture of Latin America. Another strength of the program is its interdisciplinary focus although it is challenging to get and maintain faculty support for interdisciplinary programs. In the future, adding emphases on Portuguese, African-Latino, and Central America may help attract more students. The Program is encouraged to pursue its plan for an online Certificate in Latin American Studies which could bring in additional enrollment and thus additional resources.

2. The University is currently providing 4 WTUs of assigned time per year for the Director. Given the current budgetary situation this is not likely to increase. The Director is commended for revising the Latin American Studies curriculum for the oral history project. If enrollment grows and the budget improves, an increase in assigned time will be considered.
3. The Latin American Studies program is operating on a very small budget—one that is inadequate for carrying out ambitious plans. However, the next budget cycle, 2009/10, looks to be especially difficult for the university. As a result increased budgetary resources are not likely in the near future but should be considered as the university’s budget improves.

4. Assessment of student learning is challenging for an interdisciplinary program however it is important for the Latin American Studies program to have a good student assessment plan and to collect student learning data to use for program improvement. The Latin American Studies program should work with the CLASS Office to develop a sound assessment plan, collect good data, and to use it for improving student learning.

AVP Carl Bellone and I appreciate the work of Director Solomon and the other faculty members involved with the LAST program. We’d also like to thank the CAPR members for their time and informative report.

c: Gale Young
Jim Okutsu
Sue Opp
Aline Soules
Carl Bellone