

Academic Program Assessment Report

Academic Year(s) Assessed: 2024-2025

College: Letters and Science

Department: Program in American Studies

Department Head: Susan Kollin, Program Director

Submitted by: Susan Kollin, Chair of AMST Assessment Committee

Program(s) Assessed

List all majors (including each option), minors, and certificates that are included in this assessment – add or subtract rows as needed – please use official titles:

Majors	Minors, Options, etc.
American Studies	n/a

Section 1. Past Assessment Summary.

Last year, we assessed two learning outcomes involving the use of evidence from primary and secondary sources and the ability to cite sources according to the conventions of the discipline. This year, we noted that these skills still remain a challenge for lower-division students who often cite the faculty's lectures as a form of evidence in their arguments, a practice we want to discourage. We also noted that some writers utilize a less sophisticated methodology of finding a few sources on the internet (often providing rudimentary statistical information needed for the argument) but not do not consult more academically focused sources or publications that provide in depth discussion and treatment of a topic. A question came up about whether we should have the 100-level course include research methods in the short paper assignments. We did not resolve this question and will continue to explore what this might mean for our program's learning outcomes.

Among the upper-division students, the issue no longer appeared to be a problem. The committee recognizes that the process of gaining competency in research skills is a task that takes several semesters to develop. This year we were quite encouraged by the research strengths shown in work from the upper-division class that was taught last fall.

Previously, we noted that challenges have emerged with the lower-division classes when several different faculty were rotating through the program. Currently, we have more experienced faculty members who are bringing their knowledge and expertise to these lower-division courses. Also, our graduate teaching assistants have prior experience working with AMST 101 and AMST 201, which brings greater stability to the program. We are fortunate that some of our NTT's and GTA's are trained as high school teachers and thus bring with them a background in pedagogy that is useful in assisting with the large lower-division classes.

We likewise discussed the challenges of teaching inquiry courses in an era that is beginning to experience the impact of AI. Currently, ChatGPT does not correctly or reliably generate scholarly sources for academic papers and often cannot properly cite evidence in the tradition of our discipline, but we recognize that this could change in the months and years to come.

Section 2. Institutional Assessment Data Request.

AMST 101D: Introduction to American Studies has developed student assignments that address “Effective Communicators.” AMST 202RA: The Arts in America addresses “Thinkers and Problem Solvers” and “Local & Global Citizens.”

Core Quality LOs are Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO)	PLO overlaps with MSU Core Quality Mark X if program has at least one PLO that overlaps with an ILO	Beginning Level e.g. CORE Courses (US, W, Q, IN, CS, IA, IH, IS, D)	Developing Level e.g. list one 200- or 300-level course	Proficient Level e.g. list one 300- or 400-level courses, Capstone, Research (R) Core courses	Not Applicable (N/A) No course exists in our program that addresses this Core Quality / ILO
Thinkers & Problem Solvers	AMST 202RA	Core classes are designed to address an introductory, foundational level of Core Qualities. Some may overlap into the developing level, but most intermediate-to-developing or proficient/mastery level courses will exist within the majors.			
Effective Communicators	AMST 101D				
Local & Global Citizen					AMST 202RA addresses this learning outcome but it is not included in AMST’s list of Program Learning Outcomes.

Section 3. Actionable Research Question for Your Assessment.

This year, we assessed two learning outcomes that involve the ability to a]. identify the ways American culture can be interpreted from multiple perspectives and the ability to b]. apply the analytical methods of AMST to a range of historical and contemporary issues.

Our research question is: have we put in place the necessary steps for our majors to develop a meaningful American Studies methodology? During our meeting, we noted the importance of distinguishing between addressing **interdisciplinary subjects or topics** that different fields of study engage and addressing **interdisciplinary methodologies** that make these fields of study distinctive. It seemed as if students were able to examine multiple subjects that emerge from various fields of study but needed to more intentionally address the **methods of inquiry** that shape individual disciplines.

Section 4. Assessment Plan, Schedule, and Data Sources.

Previously, we decided to assess a replacement class if AMST 401 is not offered. The course was taught in fall 2024, so we assessed that class this year as well as papers from AMST 101 and AMST 201.

ASSESSMENT PLANNING SCHEDULE CHART					
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	<i>Data Source*</i>
Our students will be able to use evidence from primary and secondary sources in making an argument.	xx			xx	15% of papers collected from AMST 101 & AMST 401 (substitute AMST 201 if capstone is not offered)
Our students will be able to cite sources according to the conventions of the discipline.	xx			xx	15% of papers collected from AMST 101 & AMST 401 (substitute AMST 201 if capstone is not offered)
Our will be able to recognize the ways American culture can be interpreted from multiple perspectives.		xx			15% of papers collected from AMST 101 & AMST 401 (substitute AMST 201 if capstone is not offered)
Our students will be able to apply the analytical methods of AMST to a range of historical and contemporary issues.		xx			15% of papers collected from AMST 101

					& AMST 401 (substitute AMST 201 if capstone is not offered)
Our students will be able to construct a persuasive argument and an effective thesis statement.			xx		15% of papers collected from AMST 101 & AMST 401 (substitute AMST 201 if capstone is not offered)
Our students will be able to communicate effectively.			xx		15% of papers collected from AMST 101 & AMST 401 (substitute AMST 201 if capstone is not offered)

b) What are the threshold values for which your program demonstrates student achievement?

Threshold Values		
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	Threshold Value	Data Source
Our students will be able to use evidence from primary and secondary sources in making an argument.	<i>The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score above 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.</i>	<i>Randomly selected student essays (at least 15%)</i>
Our students will be able to cite sources according to the conventions of the discipline.	<i>The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed</i>	<i>Randomly selected student</i>

	<i>students to score above 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.</i>	<i>essays (at least 15%)</i>
Our will be able to recognize the ways American culture can be interpreted from multiple perspectives.	<i>The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score above 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.</i>	<i>Randomly selected student essays (at least 15%)</i>
Our students will be able to apply the analytical methods of AMST to a range of historical and contemporary issues.	<i>The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score above 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.</i>	<i>Randomly selected student essays (at least 15%)</i>
Our students will be able to construct a persuasive argument and an effective thesis statement.	<i>The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score above 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.</i>	<i>Randomly selected student essays (at least 15%)</i>
Our students will be able to communicate effectively.	<i>The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score above 2 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.</i>	<i>Randomly selected student essays (at least 15%)</i>

In terms of our rationale, AMST recognizes that we will not be able to achieve 100% effectiveness in these areas each year often because of factors beyond our control. We do believe that the sample of work we collect from students should show evidence that they are gaining the skills listed in our learning outcomes. 75% of assessed work that scores as “developing” or higher is a good baseline for discerning whether students are steadily gaining skills in these areas.

Section 5. What Was Done?

The assessment process this year diverged slightly from the program’s assessment plan in that we assessed three classes instead of two (AMST 101, AMST 201, and AMST 401). Our plan stipulates that we need to assess a lower-division class (AMST 101) and an upper-division class (AMST 401). If the upper-division class we selected is not offered, we will need to substitute AMST 201. This year, we chose to assess all three classes, in part because we wanted to see how students develop across our 100-, 200-, and 400-level courses.

The chair of the AMST Assessment Committee requested random papers from the approved courses to be assessed and distributed them to other two committee members. Previously, it was suggested that we increase the sample size of our collection to 15% of the enrollment in the class. For AMST 101, we read 22 papers from fall and 16 from spring. For AMST 201, we read 6 from spring and for AMST 401, we read 1 from fall. The chair of the assessment committee tallied the numbers assigned to the student work and shared that with the committee.

Indicators	Beginning - 1	Developing- 2	Competent- 3	Accomplished- 4
#1--our graduates will be able to identity the ways American culture can be interpreted from multiple perspectives	employs a single or limited perspective to the study of American culture	describes more than one perspective but lacks sufficient depth in engaging multiple outlooks	interprets American culture from multiple perspectives but lacks strong conclusions about the benefits of doing so	clearly identifies how different perspectives help reveal the complexities of American culture
#2--our students will be able to apply the methods of AMST to a range of historical & contemporary issues	fails to identify analytical methods of AMST and that they can be applied to a range of historical and contemporary issues	applies a limited range of AMST methods to an analysis of historical and contemporary issues	examines multidisciplinary approaches but may simplify the methods or not indicate what is at stake in doing so	makes explicit connections between how multiple AMST methods enable us to make sense of a broad range of past and current concerns

Section 6. What Was Learned.

For the first learning outcome, students achieved the threshold (81.75%). For the second learning outcome, students also achieved the threshold (76.4%). We noted that lower-division students in general addressed multiple perspectives in their work but had a bit more difficulty engaging AMST methods in their work. AMST 201 serves as our methods class, so this could help explain the difference in achievement between the two learning outcomes.

The committee noted problems in comprehension that lower-division students sometimes had when engaging more complex arguments, such as William Cronon's work on the concept of wilderness. We discussed the "all or nothing" thinking that sometimes emerged in the final products that centered on this topic. We would like to help students make more nuanced arguments and discussed ways of doing so. We recognize that many of the students are straight out of high school and are just beginning to make the leap to college-level thinking and writing. Because these are skills that can be further developed in the recitation sections, the program director plans to meet with the graduate students assigned to the lower-division classes to discuss how to help students develop more complex forms of argumentation.

We were pleased to see that students are mostly writing about topics that they are invested in which makes them more engaged in their papers. We noted that the upper-division writing sample combined methods from both American Studies and Native American Studies while also engaging autotheory, all of which resulted in a richly textured analysis. The project elegantly combined history, poetry, television studies, political science, and Indigenous Studies and also showed a deep commitment to the research topic. We noted that the strengths of our program are its wide-ranging approaches and its ability to allow students to address a variety of topics. A weakness is that students come to MSU without knowledge that this field of study exists. Further publicity will help in letting new students know about AMST and what it has to offer in terms of flexibility in their coursework.

Section 7. How We Responded.

Following the assessment meeting on October 1st, the chair discussed the committee's response with a faculty member on October 10th and plans to share this information with other faculty members on October 20th. The chair will also meet later this month with the graduate teaching assistants who are

assigned to these lower-division classes to discuss strategies for teaching argumentation in the recitation sections.

We will likewise continue to discuss the potential impact of AI on our program and plan to attend Center for Faculty Excellence workshops on the topic this year. We recognize that AI can be useful in some scenarios but are not convinced that inquiry courses benefit from tools such as ChatGPT or that this technology enhances student learning in the areas of analytical thinking and writing. We look forward to hearing how other units and departments on campus are responding to these challenges in their classes this year.

Section 8. Closing the Loop.

- a. Self-Reporting Metric (required answer): Based on the findings and/or faculty input, will there be any changes made (such as plans for measurable improvements, realignment of learning outcomes, curricular changes, etc.) in preparation for upcoming assessments?

No. AMST won't adopt changes this year, but we will continue discussing whether the learning outcome involving research methods is putting too much pressure on the two lower-division classes. We will continue exploring whether only one of the classes should have this requirement or whether it is appropriate to have the requirement across multiple classes with the expectation that practicing this skill in different contexts will better position students for the work they will need to complete at the upper-division level as well as other classes they take at the university.

AMST plans to submit a proposal in this year's round of tenure-track hiring requests. We would like to enhance the program by having another .25 or .50 TT position which will enable us to develop more coursework to be offered at the 300 and 400 levels. Any outcome or programmatic changes needed as a result of having a new hire would of course take another year or so to track or implement.

- b. In reviewing the last report that assessed the PLO(s) in this assessment cycle, what changes proposed were implemented and will be measured in future assessment reports? What action will be taken to improve student learning objectives going forward?

We began discouraging and will continue to discourage students from citing course lectures as forms of evidence in their reference section or works cited sheet. We see the continued need to help students make the shift from high school approaches to the level of analytical thinking and writing that is expected at the college level. Our conversations this year will be about intentionality, particularly regarding what **interdisciplinary methods** look like rather than just the **different subjects** that are discussed in the lectures and assigned materials for our classes.

- c. Have you seen a change in student learning based on other program adjustments made in the past? Please describe the adjustments made and subsequent changes in student learning.

We find that it has helped having more stability in the staffing of the program. The faculty and the graduate students have more experience and confidence with the material and curriculum which pays off in the undergraduate classes. We value these contributions and are actively seeking ways of recognizing their hard work in these areas (i.e. through awards and other means). We've also had additional interest in the accelerated master's program and have had inquiries about an AMST minor, which are signs of successful instruction in the program.

- d. If the program sees anything emerging from this assessment cycle that it anticipates would be a factor or an item of discussion in its 7-year program review cycle, please use this space to document that for future reference.

Our program reviewers last spring suggested that we might wish to re-organize the AMST undergraduate program according to research topics instead of our current configuration of “American Arts,” “American History,” and “American Literature.” While we recognize that this could be an interesting way to reconfigure the major, we also see a challenge in doing so, especially given recent retirements in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. We have concerns about adopting any changes that are too narrowly defined or that rely on a level of available faculty with expertise in these areas, especially as this availability might fluctuate from one year to the next. We do see this new focus as a possibility that could be discussed again in our next program review cycle.

The AMST director would also like to meet with the chair of History and Philosophy to see if AMST 101 or AMST 201 could serve as prerequisites for upper-division classes in American History. This could potentially open up our major to more students who could forego taking HSTA 101 or HSTA 201 and jump into upper-division History classes more quickly. Drawing on this observation, for our next program review cycle, it would be useful to learn whether there are any impediments to the completion of the degree that could be alleviated with minor changes such as the one suggested above.

Submit report to programassessment@montana.edu

Update Department program assessment report website.

Update PLO language in CIM if needed ([Map PLOs to Course LOs](#))