

Assessment of Student Learning in the  
Asian American Studies Program  
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Submitted by Lynet Uttal  
Director, Asian American Studies Program

Background

The Program in Asian American Studies is an interdisciplinary program that focuses on the scholarship and experiences of Americans and immigrants to the United States from Asian heritage groups. The program sheds light on Asian American experiences and concerns, both historically and in contemporary society.

Certificate in Asian American Studies

An undergraduate Certificate in Asian American Studies is available for those students who wish to a sustained intellectual focus on Asian American racial formation, communities, and culture. Interdisciplinary in nature, the certificate can be obtained by completing 15 credits of course work. This certificate requires completion of the following courses with a GPA of 2.75: Introduction to Asian American Studies; 3 core courses devoted exclusively to Asian American topics, and one race comparative course. <http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/aasp/course/certificate.htm>.

Learning Objectives and Assessment

In fact, the Asian American Studies Program has never developed formal learning objectives or assessment processes prior to this request. What is presented here is what can be determined to be the learning objectives based on collective discussions, a review of the course syllabi for Spring 2009, and the new course evaluation that was re-designed in Fall of 2008.

Learning Objectives for Asian American Studies Program

1. We want students to develop **familiarity with a basic body of knowledge about Americans and immigrants of Asian heritage in the United States** (“Asian Americans”), including being aware of some of the major historical, social, and cultural experiences of Asian Americans as a pan-ethnic group as well as ethnic and national subgroups, and how to use these materials to understand and analyze contemporary Asian American experiences and cultural products (e.g. literature, policy, etc.).
2. We want students to be able to engage with course content in a way that raises awareness about Asian Americans in order to **understand how Asian Americans are positioned in systems of power** (race, class, gender, ideologies, economic and labor, etc.)
3. We want students to **develop the ability to critically engage with materials** and develop the ability to identify assumptions, evaluate the social construction of experience and power structures, and **develop their own informed analysis** based on weighing different perspectives or frameworks.
4. Given the history of ethnic studies and a commitment to activist, scholarly, and

community work, we want students **to use these critical thinking skills to think about how they might apply what they are learning beyond academic and classroom settings.**

### Focus on Assessments of Items 2 & 3.

To help students understand the larger global and systemic contexts of pan-ethnic Asian American experiences, we include a critical race theoretical framework to the content of our courses and hire faculty on this basis. To assess whether critical race thinking is being learned, we offer assignments as well as ask about this on course evaluations.

### **Type I Assessment: Demonstration of learning through assignments**

Our courses provide students with a variety of class assignments that provide this knowledge and nurture skills to think about the knowledge. The common types of assignments include:

- Primary research/original creative projects about Asian American topics
- Critical reading and response papers to cultural and social productions (literature, policy, historical events, etc.)
- Community based projects (service learning and community based research) in Asian American communities
- Reflective writing about course materials and course-related experiences
- Dance movement
- Discussion
- Observation and participation in lectures that not only provide information, but also model how to think critically as well as facilitate discussion about the course-provided knowledge.

### **Type 2 Assessment: Learning to think critically according to course evaluations**

The purpose of our redesigned course evaluation is to not just assess how well the instructor performed or how interestingly material in the course was delivered, but to also assess how students' ways of thinking is being transformed by their classroom experience. Assignments assess how well students are critically engaging with content during the course. At the end of the semester, we ask them to self-evaluate how they think what they have learned has impacted how they think. In particular we are looking for evidence of the development of critical thinking. We redesigned the course evaluations to assess how the student's way of thinking was transformed by the learning experience.

On the course evaluation forms, we ask the following questions:

I am a better critical thinker as a result of being in this course.

← 3 2 1 ⊗

1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=neutral 4=agree 5=strongly agree

The instructor encouraged me to think more deeply and in new ways.

← 3

2 1 ⊗

1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=neutral 4=agree 5=strongly agree

In addition to being exposed to information about the Asian American experience, we want to know if they are learning to think critically—a skill that is transferable to other areas of their lives where they may be asked to evaluate information and assumptions. We examine the relationship between course assignments and learning to think critically: Do assignments offer students opportunities to reflect on multiple perspectives? To identify assumptions? To be self-reflective about the meaning of the ideas? To develop their own critical analysis of the course materials (and to go beyond regurgitating readings or lectures? Are the students aware that this is “critical thinking”? We expect every course to offer up at least one opportunity to demonstrate critical thinking skills and we ask about this skill in the course evaluations.

#### Applying What Was Learned From the Assessment of Assignments and New Course Evaluation Items

As noted above, this is the first time that the Asian American Studies Program has developed learning objectives and assessment procedures. In the future, review of the course assignments across all courses is part of this process. Additionally, an examination of the two questions on the course evaluations will provide us with data as to whether an individual instructor is perceived by students as creating a critical thinking learning environment. Both of these assessments give us a concrete way to talk with instructors about improving the ways they develop critical thinking skills in their courses as well as redesigning our overall course offerings.