Task Force on Graduate Education: Selective Excellence

Program Ratings and Rationale

Program: American Studies M.A., Ph.D. Program
Rating: Additional Evaluation Required

The American Studies graduate program addresses interdisciplinary topics of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender, as well as American culture in an international context; topics that are central to the humanities at Iowa. Diversity in terms of ethnic racial minorities in the current student cohort is very good. For the student cohort entering between 1996-2001, the graduate program has a low doctoral completion of 24% (which is lowest of all UI humanities programs) and a long median TTD of 8.3 years. Even with the master's degree completion rate considered, overall degree completion is approximately 50%, suggesting that attrition is still an issue. Program requirements have recently been changed to address completion and TTD, so improvements in these indicators may occur in the future. Students who complete the doctoral degree are typically placed in academic positions or public sector jobs. The department commits 5 years of TA support to entering students, but given the long TTD this seems insufficient. Students in the program compete for and have received internal fellowships. In recent years American Studies seems to have extended itself to incorporate AINAS and Museum Studies into its programs (although the program response suggests that Museum Studies is being relocated). The student to faculty ratio is high (40/6) especially when funding is limited. Due to the interdisciplinarity of the program, most faculty are jointly appointed with other programs. The program seems aware of its limitations and the program response indicated that the program plans to decrease the next student cohort by 10%. Based on the program’s strategic assessment and response, American Studies appears to be undergoing a transition, thus the TF recommends additional evaluation of this program.