

Department of Latin American Studies Macalester College

Mission

At Macalester College, the Department of Latin American Studies seeks to provide outstanding preparation for professional careers, graduate studies, competitive fellowships, and community-based work in Latin America.

Objectives

Knowledge Objectives. Majors know the broad contours of the interdisciplinary field of Latin American Studies and its applications in specific contexts. Majors are broadly trained in understanding and analyzing Latin America at the intersections of the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts, and their work is informed by knowledge of scholarly, testimonial, and creative work by writers and artists, many of whom are from Latin America.

Skill Objectives. Majors develop core skills including: 1) interdisciplinarity; 2) language skills; 3) communication (written, oral, and visual); 4) argumentation and use of evidence; 5) comparison across national boundaries; 6) crafting a theoretical framework; 7) research design; and 8) civic engagement.

Internationalism Objective: Majors have lived and studied in Latin America, such that after graduation they are culturally, linguistically, and logistically capable of independent work and travel in Latin America.

Assessment Strategy

Assessment of how well our majors are achieving our knowledge, skill, and internationalism objectives is best thought of in three parts.

First, there are three objectives that students are obliged to fulfill in order to graduate from Macalester College with a major in Latin American Studies. These include interdisciplinarity, language skills, and capacity for independent work and travel in Latin America. The LAS major requirements mandate that students take courses across multiple disciplines, that students become proficient in at least Spanish and possibly also Portuguese or French, and that students spend a semester abroad studying in Latin America. With respect to these three objectives, we view our program as automatically “self-assessing” -- i.e., based on the collective teaching experience of our faculty, we are confident that these objectives are being met if 100% of our students are completing the basic requirements of the major (though see Senior Exit Interviews, below).

Second, there are objectives that the department emphasizes, but which individual students may or may not completely fulfill, including knowledge of the field, communication (written, oral, and visual), argumentation and use of evidence, comparison across national boundaries, crafting a theoretical framework, and research design. Given the importance of these objectives and the uncertainty that every student will achieve them, we assess these six objectives through the Capstone or Honors project completed by each major. Specifically, the Capstone and Honors supervisor (one LAS faculty member takes on this role each year) scores each completed Capstone and Honors project with the attached rubric. Our department is then able to see trends across a single cohort of majors and across multiple cohorts, to

determine which of the objectives are being broadly achieved.

And third, there is one objective that for our department is currently aspirational, and thus we are not yet ready to assess it: civic engagement. In the coming years, we plan to focus our curricular efforts in this direction in order to provide more systematic training and opportunities for civic engagement work by Latin American Studies majors, but since we have not yet done so it makes little sense to invest in assessing our efforts at this point (though see Senior Exit Interviews, below).

Assessment Tools

Assessment Tool #1: Senior Exit Interviews

Each April, the director of Latin American Studies conducts a one-hour group exit interview with the graduating cohort of majors. The director sometimes breaks the graduating seniors into two groups, either if there is a particularly large number of graduating seniors or if not everyone can meet at the same time. The students do most of the talking, with the LAS director taking notes and guiding the conversation in order to get feedback on how well the department's objectives are being met and how the program can be improved. The conversations focus on *all* LAS objectives, including "built-in" objectives like language skills and the aspirational objectives of civic engagement.

Assessment Tool #2: Capstone and Honors Rubric

The major culminates in an integrative Capstone or Honors project, often rooted in original fieldwork conducted while abroad in Latin America. The results of each project are shared in an academic or community publication or presentation in the United States and/or in Latin America. Each project is scored with the following rubric:

Latin American Studies Capstone and Honors Project Assessment Rubric

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Rationale/Motivation	No clear rationale or a weak rationale for the project	Some rationale presented, begins to motivate the work	Provides and discusses a suitable rationale	Persuasive and creative rationale
Research Design and Methodology	Not clear what was done or why, or an inappropriate method	Approach is generally appropriate and properly executed	Clearly described and justified, well-chosen and appropriate, and well-executed	Creative and sophisticated methods
Crafting a Theoretical Framework	Author does not demonstrate awareness of the scholarly literature, may over-rely on too few sources	Author demonstrates a reasonable awareness of the literature	Author demonstrates broad awareness and situates own work within the literature	Author does these things and makes a contribution to the field, or identifies a new direction for investigation
Position	Does not take a clear or defensible position or draw a clear conclusion	States and/or critiques a position that may already be in the literature	Thoroughly and effectively supports, tests, extends, or critiques a position that may already be in the literature	Develops a clear and defensible position of his/her own, draws a significant conclusion
Argument	Weak, invalid, or no argument, perhaps a simple assertion	Some arguments valid and well supported, some not	Main arguments valid, systematic, and well supported	Arguments both well supported and genuinely compared to conflicting explanations
Use of Data/Evidence	Draws on little or no evidence, mostly relies on assertions or opinions, or evidence not clearly presented	Some appropriate use of evidence but uneven	Feasible evidence appropriately selected and not over-interpreted	Fully exploits the richness of the data/evidence/ideas, and is sufficiently persuasive
Insight, Seeing Patterns and Connections	Treats related ideas or data as unrelated, or draws weak or simplistic connections	Begins to establish connections and perceive implications of the material	Brings together related data or ideals in productive ways, thoroughly discusses implications of material	Develops insightful connections and patterns that require intellectual creativity
Comparison Across National Boundaries	Paper appears oblivious to relevant and important experiences in other Latin American countries	Paper shows awareness of other country cases but does not take advantage of this knowledge to improve the core analysis	Paper is well-informed about other relevant country cases and draws implicit or explicit comparisons	Paper helps us understand other country cases and experiences through implicit or explicit comparisons

Communication				
Writing: Grammar/spelling	Significantly impairs readability	Frequent or serious errors	Some minor errors	Virtually no errors
Writing: Organization	Needs significant reorganization	Structure is of inconsistent quality, may have choppy transitions and/or redundancies or disconnections	Structure supports the arguments, clearly ordered sections fit together well	Structure enhances the argument, strong sections and seamless flow
Writing: Clarity and style	Gets in the way of reading for content	Beginning to be comfortable with appropriate conventions, style is inconsistent or uneven.	Effective prose style, follows relevant scholarly conventions, emergence of voice	Mastery of the genre, including elegant style, established voice
Oral Communication	Does not appear that student has done a full, timed rehearsal prior to presentation	Good use of time, good eye contact, and well-prepared talk	Well-rehearsed, dynamic, and engaging delivery, and confident handling of Q&A	Presentation practically memorized, even if notes are still used, allowing presenter to focus on audience
Visual Communication	Paper does not include any charts, tables, figures or photos	Paper is supplemented by visuals borrowed (with citations) from other sources	Visual aids have been adapted from other sources so that only relevant information is included	Original figure(s) or table(s) communicate core argument

Does Capstone or Honors project have a civic engagement component? If so, describe: