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Re: External Review of CALS at Sonoma State University

I hereby submit my External Program Review Report of the Chicano and Latino Studies (CALS) Department at Sonoma State University after my campus visit on April 22, 2024. I am most appreciative of the interactions I had with students, staff, faculty and administrators. Chair Dr. Daniel Malpica was particularly accommodating and helpful in coordinating the logistical matters pertaining to conducting the review in one-day. The campus visit provided me with ample opportunities (except for the library visit which didn't happen) to ascertain a wide variety of academic factors, personnel circumstances and general issues that allow an external reviewer to assess and extrapolate possible scenarios in order to make fruitful observations and possibly suitable/practical recommendations for the positive development of the Department and, by extension, of the University as a whole.

First and foremost, Sonoma State University is fortunate to have such a Department and program among its ranks because they are beneficial to both faculty and students within the context of the HSI (Hispanic-Serving Institution) accreditation which targets serving under-represented students. Such an important designation formally acknowledges the demographics of your student body of some 41% who identify as Latino/a who generally come from the northern-central region of California and are first-generation college students. One would expect that the administration, its apparatuses and operatives will work closely in conjunction with other academic units to foster and promote these students' educational access.

CALS might be considered small in size but its proportional contributions to the general academic mission and priorities of the University and to student life well exceed its circle of influence, thanks to a student-oriented pedagogy on the part of faculty who assume an extraordinary load through an extensive ad hoc role in advising and mentoring students. This can take up a considerable amount of energy and time within the classroom and obviously outside the classroom during office hours and other informal ways of dealing with students on a daily basis. The point is that faculty feel both committed and compelled to carry out such obligations because the shortage of professors and staff puts them in that situation. There does not exist much room to delegate academic duties and, consequently, everyone must pitch-in while expanding their responsibilities among and also beyond their majors.

The current external review represents a golden opportunity for everyone involved to openly contemplate and reconsider changes and shifts—externally and internally--as to how business is conducted every day within and in relation to the Department. Given that a copy of any previous review was not provided, it is difficult to measure growth by which to compare. In its absence, I can only deduce a variety of overriding principles that could be conferred anew in light of the Reorganizational Plan to place the Department within Education as expressed in the various meetings I attended. Again, revisiting such a backdrop can lead to creative and productive reconceptualization of the Department's sphere of influence as well as its role in the changing social fabric of the California State University system. When serious cooperative discussions take place, new alignments of mutual interests could be erected and negotiated in favor of all parties concerned. Some of the old barriers could give way to new, common and shared allegiances and interactions for the sake of preparing for future changes and adjustments that will more than likely become imperative. The Department indeed appears to be positioned and predisposed to facing such new questions in order to maximize its role within the University. It is ultimately preferable to engage the Department early on as an equal collaborating partner to address its goals and destiny in relation to the University priorities, instead of imposing layered structures from the top down. Promoting academic and programmatic agency for small ethnic studies departments can be a win-win relationship that can produce long-standing results and benefits for all. The proclivity among professors to function as individuals is a valued principle, but ethnic studies departments know too well that they also need to work as teams and cooperatives from within and also in relation to other departments. Best practices should be identified and pursued so as to facilitate the functions of the academic unit.

In order to expedite the organization of the report, I have divided the distinct areas into various categories as follows:

I. Mission Statement for the CALS Department

In reviewing the multiple documents provided to better capture the Department's composition, nature and objectives, I was quite surprised to not locate a centralized Mission Statement which can define in unambiguous terms what the Department portends to accomplish, how and when as part of the twenty-first century. Fortunately, the Program Self-Study does provide a good overview of the Department. There is no doubt that its evolution since the inception of Chicano/a Studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s has advanced in its core mission by serving other majors as well as their own.

Its Interdisciplinary focus is mentioned in passing as well as a Multiple Subjects emphasis, but they could be more fully or explicitly articulated in order to uniquely serve a California State University. Its intersectional lens is lauded but the concept could be further developed to avoid any duplications vis-a-vis other (non)traditional disciplines. It is true that the field addresses issues of historical, political, social, and cultural knowledge, but the range also encompasses approaches within border or borderlands, ethnic, gender and sexuality, global, class, identity, economic, decolonial, and (im)migration studies, among others. The breadth is wide but there can be specific disciplinary interventions to enrich the students' training and preparation for the modern world channeled through the ethnic studies requirement.

Some aspects that could be emphasized as integral components of the major are:

- a student-centered methodology
- an opportunity for students to examine their own particular life experience in relation to the social forces that surround them
- methods and models by which to empower students (i.e. critical race theories)
- how to instill versatility in terms of confronting issues of power and other dominant theories
- techniques and strategies to pursue links for community development
- to prepare the students for a more diverse and transnational society.

In this way, students will more readily be able to pursue careers in an assortment of academic areas, including education and teaching, counseling and social services, health, law and business. It could be further emphasized on how the major in CALS can serve as a viable transition into research in anticipation of their senior capstone project and, of course, graduate work.

In addition, the Department's Mission Statement should state its ultimate dreams and aspirations in their student majors and general student body. This mission can coincide well within the context of a regionally-grounded university by taking into account its unique student demographics. Students need to know in unconditional terms how their major or class selection will produce concrete results in acquiring knowledge, insights and subjectivities that they might utilize to negotiate future career goals.

II. Profile of Faculty: Workload, FTEs and Resources

The more immediate concern for the Department is a lack of growth in FTEs and resources over time, which is a real apprehension given the ambitious nature of its faculty as they are energized and excited about their academic environment. While experiencing a recent and critical downturn since about 2019, due in great part to Covid 19 and related social dynamics, it would appear that a predictable and potential increase in enrollment is in the near horizon. The CALS Department as well as the University need to envision such a scenario and adapt and prepare for future contingencies and exigencies. An investment in a Department that serves the entire University would be both wise and strategic from all angles: philosophical, academic and in terms of relevance. Any efforts

to alienate or downplay the Department into a second-class citizen would be greatly detrimental to the mission of both the Department and the University. These two are inextricably tied, particularly when we consider the student body makeup of first-generation students. A smart plan is one that resorts to its fundamentally social-cultural assets as a point of strength in light of the 41% who identify as Latino/a. The Department, then, can exercise considerable influence on students—transfers or otherwise--by ushering them into their future endeavors through education as a viable vehicle of empowerment, self-agency and self-realization. CALS might presently be deemed a small Department, but its impact will loom large if organized properly. Greater investment in such a Department can exponentially produce greater results on the long run, but conversely, the University also should critically examine its priorities toward hiring more Latinos across campus. Currently, according to campus-wide statistics, there are only 40 out of 480 faculty who are Latinos in a heavily Latino-based institution (only 8.3%). It would be to the University's benefit—even strategically—to dramatically improve on such numbers across the board in multiple departments instead of allowing for that to remain as the status quo. Too often, universities, consciously or subconsciously, resort to ethnic studies departments or programs as a stopgap source of addressing a heavily ethnic student body makeup. CALS should not be solely/mainly responsible for educating under-represented students more than the rest of the departments. In this manner, an increased pool of Latino faculty—within CALS and across the campus--could more adequately meet students' interests and needs more broadly across the board. To accomplish such a scenario, it might require some arm-bending on departments on the part of the Administration, while alternately convincing them that it would be of the greatest benefit to the largest number of students.

I was instantly impressed by the quality of faculty at CALS, judging from my interactions with them and especially by viewing them through the six student majors. I found the percentage of majors (6 out 19) who met with me to be remarkable (more will be said about the students later). Moreover, these majors unanimously and enthusiastically declared that their professors are “rock stars” because they consistently follow through on mentoring and advising, going beyond the “call of duty”. Among the some 5 or 6 programs I have reviewed in the past, no one referred to their professors in such laudatory terms. But it must be reiterated: a healthy department is one that is not vulnerable from the outside nor from within. If faculty truly hope to educate students through a broad slate of innovative courses, they need reinforcements because if one teacher is sick or perhaps takes a sabbatical, that will represent a 25% vacancy among the faculty which can seriously handicap the CALS program as a whole due to an immediate increase in workload. Such low numbers in FTEs, then, can produce added stress and anxiety among their ranks, exacerbating their teaching effectiveness and oftentimes forcing them to stretch themselves out thin. This is particularly salient among junior faculty who are adapting and struggling to survive within the Cal State system while they prepare for tenure and likewise hone their teaching skills and attend to their intellectual interests in publishing. Retention of such faculty should be a high priority because their growing visibility will translate into aggressive recruitment by other universities. The junior faculty are apparently on the right path scholarship-wise since one recently received a book contract from a prestigious publisher (Palgrave) and the other is nearly completing a book project. The senior faculty as more seasoned teachers and scholars have developed

well within the system and have produced a steady stream of impactful research on valuable topics such as indigenous ethnography and migration in Los Angeles along with historical treatises on educational justice and Chavez Ravine.

Regarding professional service, according to my personal experience, I must state in unwavering and categorical terms: the faculty of CALS at Sonoma State University shows signs of exertion in their multiple duties and activities. Referring to it as “invisible labor” in the Department’s Self-Study perfectly describes the situation because it is not always quantifiable if examined as an isolated case. This applies to both junior and senior faculty. For the former, however, it can be a daunting task to have to represent the Department in multiple ways as faculty advisors, in mentoring of students and in assisting various student groups (for example, one junior faculty member is serving as the faculty advisor for the Chicano/a student group MEChA). Typically, junior faculty concentrate on honing their teaching skills—and becoming acquainted with the ins and outs of a four-year institution as new faculty members. At the same time they should be ‘protected’ in some way by curtailing or monitoring their degree of participation. Again, the aim is to avoid an inevitable burnout before they are granted tenure. Senior faculty have also proven to be outstanding in their participation in academic senate committees, departmental ad hoc committees, student groups, also advising and generally serving as guides and role models for students. Their contributions, for example, to the prestigious McNair Scholars Program (Prof. D.Malpica) and to the sorority Chi Upsilon Sigma (Prof. R.López) seem typical of their serious commitment to activities outside the classroom. Other professors also contribute to an endless of activities:

- Greek life
- student organizations
- student clubs and programs such as Nu Kappa Alpha (a Latino-based fraternity)
- Lambda Theta Nu (a Latino-based sorority)
- Alpha Pi Sigma (a criminal justice honor society)
- Koret scholar program
- HSI task force
- Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)
- the California Pre-Doctoral Program
- Alianza for Equity (founded by a CALS faculty member)
- Preparing Under-Represented Educators to Realize Their Teaching Ambitions (PUERTA)

Is it inevitable to ask: how can such a small core of faculty cover so much ground? There would appear to be much on their plate of choices and responsibilities in addition to committee obligations within the Department or throughout the University (i.e. Academic Senate, etc.). We can applaud the efforts of faculty in terms of coverage and dedication, but some kind of system must be devised to monitor an over-extension or over-loading of duties. More full-time hires among faculty would of course ease the distribution of involvement. It could even come down to a fundamental issue of fairness because credit for faculty might not be commensurate for the extra in-service that they engage in. At the same time, it is noteworthy that the campus and CALS in particular facilitate, coordinate and interconnect

with the objective of giving students opportunities, especially in light of your general student clientele coming from low-income homes and as first-generation college students. A smorgasbord of opportunities in principle offers excellent prospects for students as long as the appropriate units or agencies can be more self-sustaining and not depend so much on CALS faculty for its overall success.

One concrete solution to remedy such an environment of over-commitment for both junior and senior faculty is to ideally hire a full-time undergraduate advisor or counselor or, at the very least, borrow or share one on a part-time basis from another program instead of allowing a wide array of responsibilities to fall exclusively on CALS faculty shoulders. If in fact the Reorganization Plan is to go through as is currently projected, it might be advisable to at least share resources with other units in the meantime on the staff side—although it is highly preferable to have their own staff. Another course of action to ameliorate the current situation centers on making resources more readily available for professional development. This can go a long way toward facilitating faculty's growth in explicit and subtle ways. Funds for professional conferences are always welcome as faculty know too well what other universities provide. In addition, such an active Department relishes gaining greater resources for speakers, films, career days to promote the academic unit and its faculty, making it more attractive for others from the outside. These are prime measures to encourage faculty to stay engaged in their growing discipline. Stagnation should not be an option because it hurts the Department, the curriculum and, ultimately, the students. There are various best practices that the administration can explore to apply to the Department in order to maintain it vigorous, energetic and motivated toward innovation.

III. Curriculum

The Department Program Self-Study laments a “lack of Latino representation in the institution” (despite the high numbers of Latino students) which translates into an academic unit that carries a greater load disproportionate to its size. According to informal accounts from majors, they acknowledged that the Department serves as a welcome “home away from home” among the high number of Latino students (see the HSI statistics). Moreover, it is also worth pointing out that the Department is not exclusively for Latinos as other students might very well develop an interest in the field of Chicano and Latino Studies. A systematized strategy of outreach can be created to generate greater interest in and buzz around the Department. Consequently, the Department is positioned to receive students from an array of interests and majors and in the process a fair number of students can potentially find the major attractive as an academic option. The next question is how to convert more students who seek to fulfill requirements (general and otherwise) into a pool from which to recruit more majors. One viable technique might be to fortify the minors pool despite the dwindling numbers from 16 in 2018 to 4 in 2024 and then recruit/convert them into majors as they represent a “natural” pool of candidates. This, however, can be tricky because the minor and major pools are not considered equal. That is, what is not clear from the Self-Study is how minors count vs majors in your University as a way of determining long-term departmental needs, such as FTE's and overall resources which are often determined on a competitive basis among departments and programs. Given the low numbers of majors and minors, the Department staff and professors (or someone in charge of advising) could visit classes to give a motivational presentation to attract students to consider specializing in the field of study.

Along with a counseling services office, they could help organize Career Day as another option.

Offering two tracks (Interdisciplinary and Multiple Subjects Preparation) as an integral part of the major is consistent with how and what the Department views its main academic mission. Again, only so much can be accomplished with a small team of faculty which limits the scope and variety of courses that can be offered. Aside from providing a general description of the two tracks within the context of course offerings, it is advisable to outline an explanation of the concrete benefits of the major. In other words, the Department might feature some of its particular disciplinary advantages and practicalities:

- critical thinking
- analytical and methodological skills
- understanding the phenomenon and politics of ethnicity (i.e. critical race theory, diversity, underrepresentation)
- the problematics surrounding borders and (im)migration (transnationalism)
- studies on gender and sexuality (i.e. feminisms)
- Education
- humanities and the creative arts
- social sciences unique to Chicanos/Latinos
- decolonial studies on power relations and structures
- bilingualism
- collaborative faculty-student research projects
- the study of Chicano/Latino culture through an interdisciplinary and multicultural lens (given that high schools rarely indulge in such a subject)

In conjunction with these points, the Department might also highlight some possible career options with their strong liberal arts background in order to drum up greater interest among students, particularly by tapping into the undeclared pool. Identifying some of these specific options might generate greater interest to specialize in the major:

- teaching at various levels (elementary, high school, university)
- business and market possibilities
- social work
- consultants or analysts in multiple lines of work
- law
- graduate work in a variety of fields
- a cross-section of industries
- labor
- employment in specialized areas of the economy, sociology, anthropology and the arts (i.e. artist and curatorships)
- media (but no courses seem to exist for this area)
- working abroad

Upon reviewing the courses descriptions for the core requirements and electives, it would appear that the titles are often a bit outdated, perhaps too general or at times a mixed bag. Rebranding could be in order to attract more students and, by extension, increase enrollments for the Department and the campus. For example, labelling a course “Spanish for Bilinguals” can be interpreted in various ways. Essentially, that describes the course except that current convention now leans toward calling it “Spanish for Heritage Speakers”. Someone might argue that a language course such as this one should be part of a foreign language department, but that is not always the case. Too often, traditional departments do not see the need to address native speakers or heritage speakers who possess unconventional needs by openly dealing with bilingualism, Spanglish, language borrowing and even translation, etc. CALS needs to carve out a unique niche for itself in dealing with bilingual students, and particularly if a traditional department fails to do so. It should also be said that some of the courses present a scenario of a double-edged sword because they might better fit within other departments instead of CALS: for example, “Latin American Literature in Translation” and likewise “Latin American Labor in the U.S. Economy.” Covering such broad areas as Latin American-based subjects would probably stretch the faculty even more when they are already thin; plus, these are subjects more likely applicable to other departments. On the other hand, one faculty member has a PhD in Native American Studies but no apparent courses are reflected on that subject. As a sidenote, though, it is not altogether clear what constitutes 3 or 4 units for the various courses contained within the curriculum. It is probably transparent for professors and authorities working from within, but for someone from outside the Department it is indeed vague.

With respect to course offerings for your two tracks, I wish to make some observations for CALS to reconsider. If it helps, better yet, but this might be viewed by students as more accessible and possibly easier to navigate. For example, in referring to the Core Requirements, I would change the label to “Core Prerequisites” because they happen to be the same for both tracks. In terms of electives, you might envision groupings (you call them “concentrations”) according to subareas: for example, one grouping could be more social science based, another with more of a humanities emphasis. You already have a grouping for the Multiple Subjects Concentration, so perhaps you can create a parallel subgroup for the Interdisciplinary Track, such as:

1. More humanities based: Humanities Learning Community (not sure what that is), Latino Arts and Humanities (possibly consolidate with Chicano/Latino Art History), Chicano/Latino Philosophy, Chicano/Latino Cinema, Latino Literature, Chicano/Latino Philosophy, Latino Humanisms (not sure what this is), Chicano/Latino Music, Latino Children’s Literature
2. Then consider something more within the Social Sciences: Latinas/os Globalization, courses on (Im)migration, Chicano/Latino Youth and Adolescents, Sociology of the Barrio Experience, U.S. Labor Economy, the Latino Family, Feminisms, Media Studies
3. Courses on History (unless you wish to insert it in Social Science or Humanities: The Latino Experience (which could be more defined)
4. Language: Spanish for Heritage Speakers (should this be a prerequisite for both tracks which could be fulfilled by taking Spanish courses?), Chicano/Latino Sociolinguistics

5. Research Seminar and the Capstone, Individual Studies

Again, such groupings would/could facilitate students' choices by avoiding a free-for-all listing of courses that neophytes might not know how to interconnect. I believe this could update your Major with the two Tracks in a more manageable and effective fashion. Also, there might be a way to incorporate credit for Study Abroad which is not mentioned anywhere.

IV. Departmental Morale

Again, I am pleased to report that CALS finds itself at an apex of passion, confidence and motivation because the core group of faculty share many commonalities as professionals, thanks to their respective disciplinary training. Of course, this does not represent an attempt to sugar coat anything because concerns do exist. However, the approach to solving such concerns seems to be contemplated with the utmost respect and professionalism. Their undivided commitment to Chicano and Latino Studies brings them together as a unit of common interests on behalf of students—mainly Latino but not exclusively. It has already been amply documented how they strongly tend to go above and beyond their specific professorial duties to accommodate students in the form of advising and mentorship, including individualized meetings. The 6 student majors I met with confirmed this fact enthusiastically and categorically. Although the sampling is at face value small, the collective consensus among the students spoke clearly about their perception and sentiments. They expressed praise and gratitude for faculty from the Department because each had a heart-warming story to tell about some transformative personal dealing with them. I honestly did not expect to encounter such exuberance when they are operating in a small department; yet, they see it as an asset for now instead of a liability because they are hopeful that this model of close student-faculty interactions can be continued when the Department expands in terms of faculty and students. Their optimism was indeed contagious and promising for the future of the Department.

V. Overview/Summary of General Concerns, Observations and Recommendations (in no particular order)

1. What is the Department's projection of itself within 10 years? Growth of FTEs, subareas and administrative staff (i.e. advisor).
2. Revisit and articulate a thorough Mission Statement so that all can be on the same page in the long haul.
3. Are double majors encouraged?
4. What concrete steps are being institutionalized within the Department to encourage students to pursue MAs and PhDs?
5. Are online courses an alternative for students?
6. How to address the Reorganization Plan of departments and how is CALS justified moving to Education? If it is fiscally feasible, would the Department find measured gains or become one clog of a larger conglomeration while losing some of its identity? How would this impact students in general and Latino students specifically? What qualms need to be expressed in advance?

7. What methods and techniques for recruiting students (into the Department and the University) might be created within the “best practices” mantra? Perhaps other universities have faced the same phenomenon and, instead of reinventing the wheel, investigate and document what others have done successfully. A major advisor, for example, could work with the Office of School Relations.
8. Are criteria for tenure made explicit for junior faculty?
9. How can Native American Studies be programmatically incorporated into the Department in a seamless and effective way?
10. How is the capstone requirement dealt with in a practical way? A greater definition of research courses leading up to that goal can be better delineated.
11. Does the central library possess sufficient resources in terms of books, materials, films and other media relevant to the discipline of Chicano and Latino Studies?
12. There is a dearth of theoretical subjects in your course listings; perhaps consider some.
13. Consider someone (staff or faculty or a combination thereof) to visit lower-division classes with large enrollments to promote the Department and its mission.
14. A reduction of teaching could be granted to a faculty departmental advisor, but how will that course be filled and by whom?
15. Are aspects of such disciplines as Psychology, Anthropology, Media Studies included in your courses?

In sum, I consider the CALS Department to possess a promising future because of its solid foundation as a student-serving academic unit within Sonoma State University. Many of its components are already fixtures of excellence that require minimal tweaking, such as providing greater clarity regarding the curriculum, additional FTEs and the hiring of a full-time Undergraduate Advisor. Resources and growth are instrumental for a small-sized Department trying to seize the moment and show their mettle. In addition, the Department exposes all students to the primary nature, features and contours of the discipline of Chicano and Latino Studies. The full-time faculty should be lauded for their commitment toward students, their Department and the University in general. With proper reinforcements as described and suggested in this external report, I foresee a thriving Department that can more properly balance their contractual obligations with their informal demands of supporting students via personal attention. However, the advising methods need to be reconfigured beyond an ad hoc process in order to standardize the advising and thus relieve faculty from such a heavy load of personal counseling. While it is true that CALS has developed organically through time and many of its descriptors make sense to those who are within it, it is nonetheless beneficial to re-evaluate and compare with other departments from other universities with the idea of making necessary changes. Best practices represent an integral part of most academic units as there is much to learn and apply to your academic mission in order to improve processes, ways of doing things or simply by streamlining methods and procedures.

I sincerely hope I have addressed anticipated areas of concern aside from offering insights, questions and doubts about how you do business within CALS. My ultimate aim is to provide a critical mirror of what the Department wishes to accomplish now as well as into the immediate future. Respectfully submitted.