

SOME BEST PRACTICES FOR RECRUITING STUDENTS to American Studies Programs

An ASA White Paper

The suggestions here apply to both undergraduate and graduate MA degree programs. Additional suggestions for recruiting graduate students are identified in conjunction with related points below. There are some brief specific notes about PhD programs at the end.

STRUCTURAL GROUNDWORK

- 1. Make the name “American Studies” visible** on your campus and clearly identify it with something positive. There is still a lack of name recognition of the field.
- 2. Work to get your state board of education to accept American Studies as a teaching certification field (most often for English, Language Arts, History and Social Studies).** Both English and History undergraduate majors include many students who want to teach in public schools. Certifying American Studies students to teach in public schools will help to encourage prospective junior-high and high-school teachers to consider undergraduate majors and graduate majors and minors in American Studies. It is best to engage in this process in collaboration with your colleagues in the school of education. You can then work together with those colleagues around issues related to state education policies and even develop some shared classes.
- 3. Build networks of faculty** across departments so that “American Studies” has positive name recognition with other faculty who might be teaching cross-listed classes, supervising theses, or working with TAs. Developing faculty “buy-in” with the major will give the program “good word of mouth.”

Graduate level: **Word-of-mouth** can be even more significant at the graduate level. The most common way that students hear about graduate programs is through faculty advising. Thus, an important strategy for recruiting is to **communicate and network regularly with faculty at other institutions whether by phone, email, conference conversations or even, in-person trips to other campuses**, especially if you are invited to speak there. Remind other faculty that this can be something that everyone teaching in a program does, not just the director or chair. Get undergraduate chairs and directors on your program email list. This work takes time, but it works.

- 4. Visit your own introductory American Studies courses** with information about the major, minor, concentration, graduate programs, and schedules of courses for the following semesters. Whenever possible, **visit classes** in neighboring schools.

Graduate Level: Identify other schools in the region that have American Studies minors and undergraduate degree programs but lack graduate programs. Reach out to faculty at these schools to recruit majors.

- 5. Use course schedules** and other really specific information about what people in your program do as recruiting tools.
- 6. Create student email lists** based on classroom visits, public events, conferences, and recruiting trips. Use these lists to announce American



Studies related events, newsletters, application deadlines, and upcoming courses.

7. Encourage and help students to **develop an American Studies student organization** that can do fun events or professional development workshops on campus (movie nights, discussion series, parties, etc.).
8. Hold American Studies **majors' advising days** on a regular schedule to encourage prospective students to attend.
9. Participate in your university's **high school-to-college pipeline programs**, particularly when targeted populations are groups who might gravitate toward American Studies.
Graduate: Participate in your **university's career-fairs and graduate fairs**. Attend graduate fairs or send someone from your program. Develop relationships with the university's recruiting staff so that they will send you students who come to the general graduate admissions office asking about "graduate school"
10. Use and monitor your school's **presence and traffic on Petersons** and other college "shopping" websites.
11. Attend any **university undergraduate admissions or orientation events** where students are encouraged to think about possible majors /or careers. Meeting regularly with your institution's Admissions staff to discuss your program can be valuable.
12. **Meet regularly with undergraduate advising staff** to make sure that they are aware of your major and courses offered. Develop relationships with the career-advising center so that they will be able to advise students about what kinds of careers students can pursue with an American Studies degree.
13. **Hold public events and /or on-campus mini-conferences** featuring your own faculty and students giving presentations.
14. **Hold regular recruiting events** in well-trafficked locations—include food/or music. Bring current students to recruiting events to talk about the program with prospective students.
Graduate: When students are accepted, maintain regular one-on-one communication; **hold a social-mixer or orientation events for newly admitted students**; make funding available as early as possible. Get prospective students to meet current students and/or successful alumni.
15. **Hold awards and graduation ceremonies** and celebrations promoting and celebrating your students.
16. When holding events do public relations announcements to **get media coverage in local and school publications**.
17. Use all opportunities to **work with your campus's PR staff** to get your students and faculty featured in university publications, websites, etc.
18. **Create your own program newsletter** featuring news and accomplishments of program students and faculty. Feature alumni stories on your website and newsletters.
19. **Use social media** in coordination with events, course announcements, and newsletter publications.
20. **Undergraduate and Graduate Minors or concentrations:** These can be successful in gaining enrollment in American Studies classes in universities and colleges where there is a significant emphasis on business, technical and professional degrees. "Do that computer science degree to please your parents, but minor in American Studies because it's more interesting, fun, flexible, cool, life-enhancing, critical, etc." Pairing certificates can be particularly successful with related graduate degrees in education, creative writing, and/or non-profit management.

SOME TALKING POINTS

- Clearly identify American Studies as “just as valuable” in terms of career preparation as a major in history, English or Anthropology but also “interdisciplinary”, “flexible”, “interesting”, “cool,” “socially engaged.” This can attract students who are generally interested in the humanities.
- Use all the data generated about the value of humanities degrees in professional life. See resources mentioned in "[How to Position American Studies as Vital to Your Institution of Higher Education.](#)"
- The best recruiting information is telling the specific story of the great stuff that is already being done by your own students.
- Let people know that American Studies is not “rah rah USA” or about American exceptionalism—which is what many students think. Students expecting “rah rah USA” are likely to be unhappy in your program and students who are more critical may “write off” American Studies because of this misconception.

PhDs

For recruiting PhD students, the recruiting will more likely to be directed at getting really strong candidates rather than getting large numbers of applicants. Obviously, beyond the word-of-mouth and publicity strategies mentioned above, the top elements for recruiting strong PhD students are:

- Recognized and highly productive faculty
- A good placement record for PhDs including in “alt-ac” careers
- Adequate funding
- Some sense that students’ interests will be supported and encouraged by the faculty and program administrators
- A strong and positive student culture
- Hiring American Studies PhDs to teach in your American Studies program would be a good recruiting move to demonstrate the marketability of American Studies PhDs in higher education.*

* Many administrators of American Studies programs have doctorates in areas other than American Studies, while placement rates for American Studies PhD have been volatile in the past few years. For information on placement rates, please see http://www.theasa.net/resources/dissertations/doctoral_recipients_employment_and_career_survey/.

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About the 2015 ASA White Paper Series

The ASA National Committee, in response to a proposal put forward by the Committee on Departments, Programs, and Centers, established a Task Force to coordinate advocacy efforts for ASA institutional members. Launched in 2014, the Task Force set about to produce, among other resources, a white paper series that addressed key questions and concerns that confront chairs and directors of American Studies. Authored by chairs, directors and coordinators at a range of institutional types, the 2015 ASA White Papers aim to create, understand, articulate, position, and sustain American Studies within the current landscape of higher education in the U.S. and globally.

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About the American Studies Association

Consisting of over 5000 members and supporting scholars, teachers, administrators, writers, critical thinkers and activists from the U.S. and around the world, the American Studies Association is the oldest and largest association devoted to the interdisciplinary study of U.S. culture and history in a global context. In pursuit of these goals, the ASA has evolved into one of the leading scholarly organizations known for taking action in the worlds of politics and policy to create and defend conditions for open debate and the pursuit of meaningful, engaged scholarship, and teaching.

Contact the ASA

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