

STRATEGIES FOR PROGRAMS, CENTERS, & DEPARTMENTS under the threat of budget cuts

An ASA White Paper

Those of us in the American Studies Association are aware that our programs' existences are subject to budget cuts, administrative priorities, and decisions by university governing boards.

We urge that program, departments, and centers—to the extent that is possible with limited personnel and resources—consider the following strategies.

- 1.** Proactive strategies (these of course would need to be based on specific local contexts)
 - a.** Develop and nurture relationships with key community stakeholders
E.g., alumni, parents of students, historical societies, humanities councils, K-12 educators, local business and tourist chambers of commerce, organizations
Examples:
 - 1.** An e-newsletter to remind administration and stakeholders about why your program is significant in the local context; what your alums have accomplished and are now doing
 - 2.** Try to identify allies on and off campus who understand the value of your program, including those who have access to certain resources that the program may not
 - 3.** Maintain an updated contact list
 - b.** Alumni networks and current student organizations are valuable resources
Some universities' cultures embrace events such as Homecoming as a way to nurture alumni and current student relationships.
 - c.** Make visible why your program is significant for the university in meeting its mission (e.g., diversity, local relevance, preparing students to negotiate the increasingly global and diverse society, etc.)
Public intellectual activity like op-eds in the local paper, giving local talks (of course based on limited time).
- 2.** Responding to threats of the program being dismantled
 - a.** Mobilization of all the stakeholders described under proactive strategies
 - b.** Media Strategy (including social media and students): who can write op-eds and get them placed
 - c.** Analyze the reasons for the cuts, and how the cuts reflect or do not reflect the university mission. Respond specifically to the rationale for the cuts.
In 2014 University of Southern Maine (USM) faculty across campus generated analyses that showed the budget cuts—which would have disproportionately affected faculty of color—were not as necessary as the president and provost assumed.
 - d.** Allies in state government and community who can exert pressure on administration

3. National level strategies to consider at the same time:

- a.** National level input from scholars known to the administration or from universities held in high regard by the administration (again, this is specific to local contexts—you may have a legislature and board of trustees that is suspicious of Ivy Leagues; political pressure from someone who is respected politically may work better)
- b.** National statements from academic organizations (again, only with permission of the program under attack given the specific political contexts of each program)
- c.** Sometimes, if there appears to be more leeway in the administration, one might invite top scholars from institutions respected by the institution to visit the program, give a public talk (to which one would rally stakeholders to attend) and meet with the administration—an informal program review in some ways. The ASA can be a resource here.
- d.** If tenured faculty may be retrenched (laid off), must be in contact with AAUP representative

For more on this topic, see "[How to position American Studies as vital to your institution of higher education.](#)" 

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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.

Acknowledgments: Lynne Adrian, Ben Chappell, Lorraine Cox, Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Lisa Duggan, Ben Feldman, Matthew Frye Jacobson, Alyosha Goldstein, Rebecca Hill, Karen J. Leong, Curtis Marez, Chandan Reddy, and Mark Rice.



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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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