ICAPP NOTICE OF INTENT: Latin American Studies, BA

Western Washington University

Program Description

In the last few decades, Latin America has gained a global relevance. According to the United Nations, as of 2016, Latin America had a population of approximately 639 million people. The region has also witnessed the emergence of global economic powers such as Brazil and Mexico. Latin America is indeed redefining the global economy, as it has developed important links to other economic titans such as China, India, and Africa. The United States and the different countries of Latin America have shared a critical history since the nineteenth century. Currently, close to 60 million Latino/a/x people are part of the U.S. society. Latino/a/x constitute 18 percent of the nation’s total population. (Hispanic American Month, 2017) It is then safe to say that the histories of Latin America are part of the histories of the United States and the histories of the United States are indeed part of the histories of Latin America.

Across Western now has approximately 35 faculty members whose teaching and research focus is related to the region we usually call Latin America. This interdisciplinary major in Latin American Studies (Anthropology, Fairhaven, History, Modern Classical Languages, Political Science, Sociology) seeks to expand—and formalize—the intellectual presence of Latin America across campus. The main objective of the major is twofold. First, through a core curriculum in History and Modern Classical Languages (Spanish section), it seeks to provide a broad-based knowledge of Latin America. Second, by offering an ample repertoire of electives from different departments across the university, the major offers a unique opportunity for each student to pursue a more specialized area of interest.

Institutional Role and Mission

This program follows directly from Western’s mission and results in no change in mission.

Documentation of Need for the Program

In the last decade or so, there has been a significant increase of Latino/a/x population in Washington State. Recent admissions information suggests that Latino/a/x students from the state of Washington are coming to Western to pursue their studies. In fact, as a growing interest in Latin America across campus has expanded, the number of students taking Spanish at Western has grown. Thus, an interdisciplinary Latin American Studies major can meet the needs of the increasingly diverse student population, not just because Latino/a/x students want Latin American Studies, but also because that LAS can give all of us the tools and knowledge to understand their diverse experiences.

Similarly, across the state dual language programs (Spanish and English) at the middle and high school level have increased to meet the needs of Washington’s changing student body, which suggests that the university should also meet these needs at the higher education level by expanding the opportunities offered to students who want to continue building up knowledge about Latin America.

University of Washington has a Latin American studies major. Central Washington has developed a Center for Latino and Latin American Studies center but offers only a minor in Latin American studies. To our knowledge, Eastern Washington has not proposed a Latin American Studies minor or major. These realities suggest the need for a Latin American Studies major in one of the most important institutions of higher education in the state. But this also speaks of the opportunity to create collaborative efforts across different campuses. At an informal level, several faculty members located in the Northwest, from University of Washington to University of British Columbia to Central Washington to Western, have gathered to discuss the possibilities of this collaborative effort. The Latin American Latino/a and Iberian Studies Association (LALISA) conference is coming to Western in April 2009. This is a clear effort to foster projects involving research, resources and opportunities across institutions to promote contact with the Pacific Northwest community at large. It also speaks of how Western is getting recognition in organizing research and teaching events about Latin America.

Housing the Latin American Studies major in two departments and offering the students the possibility to choose between two concentrations makes our proposal unique while inviting us to work in collaboration in different teaching and research projects.

Format and Articulation

This major will be offered on campus. It is an interdisciplinary major in Latin American Studies that will develop a core curriculum in History and Modern classical languages (Spanish) but will integrate other disciplines such as anthropology, economics, political science, and sociology.

Students

The major will serve non-native, native, heritage learner and first generation students. We also envision mentoring students affiliated with various campus organizations and programs such as MECHA, the Latinx Student Union and the Associated Students of Western. In five years we project to have 35-40 majors.

Resource Implications

As of now, we do not foresee any need for extra resources. Western has attracted faculty with diverse research and teaching interests in Latin America. Across campus, Western now has approximately 35 faculty members whose teaching and research focus is related to the region we usually call Latin America.