

Evaluation report Fall 2022

American Studies

Study Programme: American Studies

Level: BA/BA minor/MA

Study Board: English and American Studies

Evaluation strategy for the education: Midterm and final

What specific courses does this summary include:

BA level: American Literature before 1900, Sprog og samfund, American History, Intro to American Studies, US Religion, American Culture and the World, Case Studies in American Studies, American Foreign Policy, Viden-skabsteori II, The US Presidency

MA level: Topics in American History and Society, Topics in American Literature and Culture, Theory and Method in American Studies, American Studies in Practice, The US Presidency,

Positive examples for inspiration:

The evaluations are overall positive. Students in particular point out that a clear and focused initial discussion on the goals and terms of course requirements and exams are helpful. Clarity and specified goals are clearly a high priority and something that by far most lecturers are capable and willing to provide. The students also liked the classes in which the format of the teaching varies. The majority of courses receive excellent evaluations and the students seem happy with the degrees overall. As positive examples for inspiration, it seems important first and foremost not to bend to demands of shorter texts, reduced syllabi and an increase in (even) more hand-held teaching, preferably in powerpoint format. In the cases in which students have felt challenged by a competent lecturer, they have clearly thrived.

Conditions that call for further follow-up:

As in the years before, some confusion from both lecturers and students on exactly what (and when) "replacement papers" cover in the portfolio-based exam courses (of which there are many). This will however be amended from next year, seeing as the 100 per cent attendance and the accordant replacement papers will go the same way as the fallen angels in Milton's Paradise Lost: down and out.

As it has been the case in former years, some lecturers forget to follow up and comment on the students' evaluations of their courses, hence somewhat complicating giving a full report here. Also, as is often the case, many students still do not seem to grasp the implications of both the BA and the MA being the equivalent of a full-time

job and either underreport the hours spent on preparation or genuinely do not put enough work into it. Some (albeit possibly only one) student(s) even outright state they do not prepare for class, which is obviously extremely worrying and needs addressing - although to what extent this is the result of general trends and out of the hands of specific degrees is something to be considered.

There has been a specific and worrying tendency for second year undergraduates to generally not participate in classes, seeing as only the first year of the BA requires active participation in class. This has however now been amended in the revisions to the new studieordning so as to make sure that attendance is mandatory throughout the BA.

Some complaints about physical limitations of premises, e.g. U140 not being conducive to required tasks.

A particular and especially vexing grievance for students and lecturers alike are a couple of courses in which the student mass seems split between experiences of the educator being competent at the job, while others call out practices of "discrimination and shaming". To what extent these are isolated incidents or results of a general teaching environment/personal relations that has/have soured, or a deeper-lying structural problem with either students and/or lecturer is difficult to gauge from afar. Head of study has prior to the evaluations had an ongoing discussion with both students and the educator in question, but it has been difficult to solve the deadlock between the disgruntled students and the lecturer due to staff shortages (impossible to offer alternative teachers) as well as written response from the lecturer lacking on the reports of the aforesaid students. What is more, given the requirement of 100 per cent attendance on many of these courses, it has also been difficult to solve this through various kinds of self-study as the structure of the program ensures maximum contact between students and staff. As mentioned in the above, this will however change in the new format where there is less (albeit still some) focus on strict attendance keeping and replacement papers.

Overall comment on active participation (or even just physical attendance in class): while the focus on attendance and replacement papers has been helpful to some, to others it has been a hindrance, particularly in the unfortunate situation of the gridlock described. The discrepancy between full attendance and no attendance in year 1 and year 2 of the BA in combination with the Dionysian rush of a post-covid life seems to have posed significant ontological and existential challenges to a fair number of students. To a not insignificant portion of second year undergraduates, this unfortunate cabal of well-meaning but possibly counterproductive structural strictures and freedoms on academic undergraduate life in combination with the zoonotic spillover that left universities and other educational institutions all over the world as ephemeral rather than actual and physical entities for two years seem not only to linger, but possibly also to fester. This so to the extent that the two have wed in unholy matrimony, hence also to the erroneous conclusion that studying at a university is a fully abstract and ethereal experience. Hopefully, the gradual ease (and erasure) of the pandemic years combined with the new and more evenly distributed attendance acquirement across the degree will help alleviate and eliminate this worrying trend.

Initiatives since the last evaluation: A complete and exhausting overhaul of both the BA and MA program. We shall and should wait to see what the outcome of these drastic changes will be, but are unlikely to be allowed to see much of the actual outcome of this before we upend everything once more - seeing as every new year, government or current hot political trend is likely to uproot everything once again. So plenty of new initiatives, every year, albeit with an increasing sense that these are being made more with a nod to the motto of Nike more than anything else: just do it.