Area Studies at SMU

Recommendations of Committee appointed by Dean William Tsutsui

February 20, 2013

Area Studies have been a long established, if undernourished, part of the Dedman College curriculum and institutional structure. At present we have programs housed within the International Studies curriculum (as minors only; the minor in Asian Studies is in IS, but its other programs and structure exist independently) and a very small number of humanities oriented programs within the Department of World Languages and Literatures. But these have little identity beyond (with the exception of Asian Studies, which has outside donors- and does run programs and lectures to reach beyond SMU). There are many Dedman College faculty, who do research on regions beyond US borders and who conduct their work abroad (often using languages other than English), but there is little substantial Area Studies institutional presence that might bring these faculty together in intellectual discourse, research activities or even education. In most respects SMU has been dominated by traditional academic disciplines and their home departments. Cooperation on academic programs across departments is sporadic and lack of institutional support for area studies has resulted in uneven faculty involvement in such programs. It has proven difficult, for example, for faculty members to secure permission from their departments to teach International Studies courses or to participate in just about any non- departmental based activity.

Programs in International Studies are listed below.

Asian Studies

Latin American and Iberian Studies

European Studies

Africa/Middle East Studies

Programs in the Department of World Languages and Literatures (minors):

Russian Area Studies

Italian Area Studies (discontinued)

Area Studies, as is well known, is a twentieth century phenomenon, whose growth was spurred by the emergence of the US upon a global stage and whose apogee was reached within the political and cultural framework of the Cold War. Area Studies was supported by the large foundations and the US government (such as the ACLS and SSRC joint committees, the Carnegie and Ford Foundations and Titles VI and VIII of the federal government). The end of the Cold War coincided with shifting intellectual fashions and interdisciplinary area studies remained in place, but were weakened by lower levels of support as global, international and transnational studies became new players. Still there was and remains a glaring need for deep knowledge of regions and non-US culture all over the globe (as we have painfully learned in the wake of 9/11 or as we attempt to negotiate a meaningful relationship with China or indeed as we look at just about all historical and cultural developments since 1991). Area Studies was always at a disadvantage because it offered many fewer Ph. D. degrees than the academic disciplines. Soviet or socialist

economics, Communist party institutions, for that matter, the political institutions of ruling right wing parties were no longer suitable research topics for the Ph.D. Rational choice, modernization, transition to Democracy and many others came to fill the post-cold War void. Foundations such as Ford and Carnegie, the historical sponsors of area studies, became more interested in problem solving within a new regional, and of course, global framework. So Area Studies lives on today and even at SMU, but renewal and revision are in order, reforms that would embrace the new directions of the social science and humanities disciplines upon which Area Studies must always be based. One of our most important goals at SMU must be to bring together the humanities and social science dimensions of Area Studies. We must create a framework that unites social science, the study of culture and the potential application of both to public policy, community outreach, and higher education without privileging any one of these agendas or the faculty most interested in them.

Recommendations

Area Studies needs to be reorganized and reaffirmed as essential in Dedman College's broader goals of "internationalizing" the student and faculty bodies. Area Studies is uniquely placed to be the leader in this endeavor, not only because its faculties are specifically concerned with larger issues of an international education, but also because Area Studies is, by its nature, cooperative and interdisciplinary, drawing on several departments and units throughout the College and the University. Knowledge of the world in all of its complexity needs be recognized and

reaffirmed as an essential approach in an era of radical globalization, increasing emphasis on the interdisciplinary, and the more general social, political, economic processes that shape the past and present. It is about historical cultures as well as present day creativity and imagination. We hereby propose a multi-step process to achieve this end, one which builds upon the success and value of the earlier steps.

First: we recommend the reconceptualization of all area programs and appropriate international initiatives into a single initiative with a common purpose. That purpose, in its broadest sense, is the "internationalizing" of faculty, staff, and students of Dedman College and SMU as a whole under a single initiative. This initiative could be conceived of as "World Cultures and Area Studies Initiative" or an appropriate alternative. This Initiative will integrate various programs into a common purpose (Initiative as shorthand henceforth). Such an Initiative can unify the many excellent resources that SMU currently has, but which have, for various reasons, developed independently and unevenly.

Second: the Initiative will endeavor to bring these goals under a unified leadership. In this regard, we recommend the appointment of a Director or other suitable administrative position. The title and responsibilities of this office holder should be carefully considered for the effective pursuit of both the on- and off-campus missions outlined here.

We strongly suggest that the above two recommendations be implemented as soon as is possible.

In the short-term, the Initiative could be part of an already existing institutional body, such as the Tower Center or the Interdisciplinary Institute (though others might also be imagined). We envision this as a transitional phase since these institutional units have their own agendas and goals, and while those overlap with the Initiative (indeed, we expect great cooperation between these groups), they are also fundamentally distinct and the Initiative should be pursued separately. Eventually, the Initiative should become a independent unit (such as a Center or something comparable), but that will depend on the success of its mission in the early stages.

The Director of the Initiative would initially have responsibilities for promoting the new relationships in research, teaching, and academic programs that are "international" in the broadest sense, as well as outreach to the SMU community and beyond. The Director must be enabled and encouraged to apply for external grants. In regards to exploring and applying for external grants, we recommend that the Initiative work closely with Renee McDonald, Associate Dean for Research. For possible foundation support, the new Director could also utilize the skills and resources of Courtney Corwin, Dedman College's Development Director. In order to properly project the mission to the larger university bodies, the Initiative should also consult closely with Dedman College's Marketing Director, Jennifer Dickerson.

At the same time, each area studies program should retain sufficient autonomy to flourish under the general supervision of the Director. Each regional specialization will have its own goals and needs that may be independent of a larger initiative and each should have its own advocate. This is particularly important in a university like SMU where specialty-clusters are small and there is the potential of larger programs dominating any Initiative agenda. Currently, Asian Studies is the most active area studies program, but we see immediate promise in revitalizing the Middle Eastern Studies program and Latin American Studies. Moreover, the Dean should closely consider the creation of an African Studies program at SMU, since there is now a critical mass of faculty in this area and growing interest. The Director of the Initiative should serve as advocate for programs temporarily suspended or in-wait of appropriate leadership.

This World Cultures and Area Studies Initiative must be rooted in the interdisciplinary study of regions broadly conceived, but unlike in the past, it must take cognizance of the internationalization of national histories, that is the extension of national histories beyond formal borders, the importance of regions, borderlands, and transoceanic processes. In this way, the Initiative is not simply "regional specialization," but a multidisciplinary nexus which emphasizes the complex interactions of those regions. As such, we are recommending a model uniquely situated not only to the modern world, but also to our evolving knowledge of how past and present regions were and are interconnected.

The primary aim of the Initiative is to create a center of research and education in the broadest sense at SMU. This goes far beyond the present limited role of Area Studies as simply a part of the undergraduate International Studies curriculum. The Initiative must be fully engaged with the new University Curriculum, with its global experience component, its newly formulated language requirements, and with Engaged Learning. The Initiative should also be a leader in the recent expansion of Study Abroad, offering new opportunities and a systematic presentation of all that Dedman College and SMU has to offer in the study of the world. In this way, the Initiative can bring Study Abroad, World Languages, and Area Studies specialists across departments into an integrated educational strategy and highlight its benefits to the faculty and student bodies and larger regional community.

The Initiative will endeavor to make connections to the various undergraduate and graduate programs, research institutes and centers at SMU within and beyond Dedman College. Currently, these various programs function fully independently, with little or no cooperation in regard to "internationalization," programming, etc. The Initiative's vision will unite these extensive resources into a common cause. We anticipate a strong desire from these schools to participate.

The Initiative, which combines Area Studies within a larger world-oriented vision, is also particularly well-situated to serve in support of public policy and community endeavors. As it stands, Dedman College contains many “expert knowledge

clusters" that simply need cohesion (and leadership) to advise and act in venues such as public policy, mass media, primary and secondary education, interfaith dialogue, and SMU student group advising, among others. It will serve as a nexus for schools and programs in SMU, it also could serve as a central "clearing house" for promoting such programs to Dallas and the region.

This Initiative as center of world learning at SMU is a multi-stage process that will build off its own momentum. Initially, we envision the resources necessary to embark on this initiative to be quite small, since its main goal is to serve as the central hub in the network of global, world, and international agendas throughout Dedman College.

Administrative functions of the Initiative should be formally separate from individual areas which already exist, and the Initiatives' emphasis in the early stages will be on connecting these areas through programming, curricular reform, and the pursuit of external funding. We envision initial programming to be geared at fostering cooperation between what have been distinct programs in the past and that, at the outset, such programming can be funded internally, such as through the Dean's Office, the Tower Center, and the Interdisciplinary Institute.

The Director of the newly formed Initiative will be in an ideal position for researching and applying for nationally competitive grants. As is well-known, grants on the federal level have decreased significantly in recent years, but a newly

conceived Initiative by Dedman College—one that is both creative and integrative—will place the Initiative in a strong position to apply for startup, matching, and/or growth grants.

Finally, the development of such an Initiative will also require a review of the majors and minors within World Languages and Literatures and International Studies so as to a promote a common, integrative goal. This review should consider the relationship of these programs, the nature of their administrative relationship, and especially their current curriculum. Particularly important in this review is the last and the ways to promote coherence and integration of future offerings in the new curriculum. This new Initiative could lead in this regard, being uniquely situated to transcend current boundaries.

Should these initial steps be followed and should they be as successful in garnering interest amongst the SMU community as those on the committee are certain they will be, we anticipate a relatively quick growth of the Initiative into a larger university unit. The Dean's office and other appropriate higher administration must be cognizant of the fact that, more significant resources will be needed for its continued development (such as support staff, office space, etc.). Until that stage is reached, resource-sharing or other appropriate measures must be strongly considered to aid in the initial goals of external grant writing, coordination of programming and interests of the various constituencies at SMU, and curricular review and reform.

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