



TO: AP&P Committee,
FROM: Melissa H. Birch, Associate Professor
DATE: October 6, 2021
RE: Discontinuance of degree programs in Latin American and Caribbean Studies

As a faculty member affiliated with this program for many years, I write to express my concern regarding the decision to discontinue this program. As a faculty member in the School of Business, it will not surprise anyone that I am sympathetic to efficiency arguments, but this decision does not reduce costs and does jeopardize revenues. Even the program review that proposes the merger notes that the Latin American undergraduate and graduate programs are “cost effective.”

The Recommendation for Discontinuance notes that students will be able to find “LAC options” despite the elimination of the LAC program, but “options” are not the same thing as majors, minors, and degrees. Students and prospective students seeking a Latin American major will be able to find it and other “LAC options” (including a Latin American Studies minor or certificate) at competitor universities in our region. In such a difficult student recruiting environment as that created by the demographics of the State of Kansas, it is hard to understand why making a cost-effective degree program unavailable to students who want it is in the University’s best interest.

More importantly, however, the University is engaged in strategic planning process and a part of that is an eighteen-month Internationalization Lab conducted under the auspices of the prestigious American Council on Education. Making major adjustments to majors, minors, programs, and interdisciplinary centers before the new strategic plan is complete seems hasty. Risky, in fact, since we may be destroying an asset that may be needed in the near future to exploit a competitive advantage and attract additional revenues to the University. The impact of this decision on KU’s designation as a National Resource Center in Latin American Studies, a designation that is critical to our AAU standing, is unknown. That standing will be up for reconsideration in 2022.

Finally, a particularly worrisome sign of the haste with which this decision is being made is the fact that the major and minor in Latin American and Caribbean Studies are being terminated BEFORE the new Latin American tracks or concentrations in the GIST major have been approved. That does not seem prudent. Taken together, the decision to recommend discontinuance of these degree programs at this time is hard to defend as being in the best interests of the University, its students, faculty or staff.