

UMBC Department of American Studies: Interim APR Report, 2016-2019

Section 1. Notable Progress

Over the past three years, the most notable progress in the Department of American Studies (AMST) has been (1) the stabilization of our faculty (Item 1a and 1b) with the hire of three new full-time faculty members in 2019 and (2) the development of new minors in Asian American studies in 2017 (Item 3) and public humanities in 2019 (Item 6 and 6b).

Hiring of Three New Faculty Members:

At the time of the last Academic Program Review in 2016, we had six full-time faculty members--four tenure-stream professors (three associate and one assistant), a senior lecturer, and an exploratory position funded in part by Maryland Traditions, the folklife program of the Maryland State Arts Council. In 2018 we lost two of our associate professors to other institutions/programs. In 2019, AMST was able to hire based on our long-term plan to build capacity in public humanities and community-engaged research and teaching. Today, AMST has six full-time faculty—two associate professors, two assistant professors, a senior lecturer, and a professor of the practice.

In fall 2019, we welcomed to the department two new assistant professors in public humanities, Michael Casiano and Sarah Fouts, and a new professor of the practice as the inaugural director of the program in Public Humanities, Ashley Minner. Minner's hiring was the culmination of a multi-year partnership (beginning in 2010) with Maryland Traditions to seed a full-time public folklorist at UMBC. All of our new hires are exceptional and expand our focus on public humanities, community engaged scholarship, immigration, and community-based work in Baltimore. The new hires add significant strengths to the department's focus on place, community, and identity from a local and transnational perspective (the department's vision since our last APR) and to inclusive excellence at UMBC.

Michael Casiano is an assistant professor in AMST with a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Maryland, College Park. His current book project, tentatively entitled *Broken City: Race, Property, and Policing in Early Twentieth-Century Baltimore*, examines the relationship between everyday policing and urban development during the first-half of the twentieth century. Casiano has been involved in grassroots housing justice efforts in Baltimore for the past several years as part of [United Workers](#), a grassroots human rights organization, and [Charm City Land Trusts](#), a community land trust located in East Baltimore's McElderry Park, where he also lives.

Sarah Fouts is an assistant professor in AMST with a Ph.D. in Latin American Studies from Tulane University and an M.S. in Urban Studies from the University of New Orleans. Fouts' research interests include transnationalism, Honduras, New Orleans, ethnography, labor, accompaniment methodology, and food studies. Currently, Fouts is working on a book manuscript, *Tacos and Gumbo: The Politics of Food, Labor, and Immigration*, which uses ethnographic and archival research to analyze the transnational stories of Central American and Mexican food industry workers in post-Katrina New Orleans. Fouts' community engaged research centers on activist scholarship with the [New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice](#).

Ashley Minner a professor of the practice and inaugural director of the Public Humanities program. Minner is a community based visual artist from Baltimore with a M.F.A. in Community Arts from MICA. She is an enrolled member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina and has been active in the Baltimore Lumbee community for many years, and regularly visits communities throughout the U.S South and Latin America as part of her artistic practice and public humanities work. She is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of American Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, where she is completing her dissertation on the changing relationship between the Baltimore Lumbee community and the neighborhood where they first settled. She regularly teaches AMST 345: Indigenous Heritage: Issues of Representation and Ownership.

New Minors/Programs in AMST:

Asian American Studies minor:

In 2017, AMST developed a minor in Asian American Studies (AAST) (Item 3) with Tamara Bhalla as the director of the program. Shortly thereafter we graduated two minors in 2018, one who published research on Baltimore's Chinatown in the *UMBC Review* and is now doing graduate work at Columbia University. Due to the increase in Dr. Bhalla's departmental service load and with the loss of two tenured faculty (one being the co-founder of the AAST minor) in 2018, we have not prioritized the promotion of the minor until we rebuild adequate support and rethink the focus. Key faculty teaching in Asian American Studies left the university or are currently on leave for this academic year.

Dr. Bhalla envisions 2020-2021 as a year of planning and networking across campus to collaborate with other faculty working in Asian American studies to build the minor and Asian American studies as a field and program on campus. Her primary aim will be to expand the minor in a sustainable way, connecting it to the department's core initiatives in public humanities and community engaged scholarship. Prior to the next APR, she aims to incorporate the expertise and participation of faculty in other CAHSS departments and build Asian American studies as a community engaged field on campus, in part by establishing a connection between the department and Asian American and Pacific Islander studies at the Smithsonian's National American History Museum. Additionally, Dr. Bhalla will reach out to faculty in other departments to think through how we can fill the curricular and programming gaps in this field on our campus in order to best serve our students interested in Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies. **In consultation with faculty in the department and the dean's office, and in collaboration with other programs and departments doing work in the same field, the department will discuss the potential of converting the minor in Asian American studies to a minor in ethnic studies.**

Public Humanities Minor:

Since the last APR, from 2016-2019, one of the major achievements of our department has been the multifaceted ways it has built public humanities on our campus. AMST worked collaboratively with other departments and programs in CAHSS **to develop a college-wide minor in public humanities that is housed in the Orser center (Item 6b).** Nicole King, chair of AMST, co-chaired the working group, convened by our dean in September 2016, with Jessica Berman, the director of the Dresher Center. The working group, with representatives from a dozen different departments and programs in CAHSS, worked together to build the minor in public humanities.

The department has become a leader in building public humanities on campus in the following ways:

- A. The **Public Humanities working group** co-chairs organized a symposium in the Dresher Center on January 26, 2017. The day-long symposium brought in experts in public humanities from across the country: Seth Moglen (Lehigh University, South Side Initiative), Mary Rizzo (Associate Director of Digital and Public Humanities Initiatives, American Studies & History, Rutgers University, Newark), Stephen Robertson (Director, Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, George Mason University) and Miriam Bartha (University of Washington, Bothell, Co-director, Certificate in Public Scholarship). We also hosted a panel of local experts from organizations in Baltimore. After the symposium, the working group finetuned the proposal for the minor in public humanities during 2017. In 2018, we worked with students and alumni engaged in public humanities work at UMBC to receive feedback on the proposal. Through this process a close relationship with interdisciplinary graduate programs at UMBC was added. The proposal was also shared with the Humanities Scholars and further revised to be inclusive of and attentive to student perspectives. The public humanities minor was approved by the Undergraduate Council (UGC) in fall 2018 and is housed in AMST's Orser Center. In 2019, many of the initial working group members joined the advisory committee for the Public Humanities Program, which currently includes representation from over 15 different departments, programs, and centers in CAHSS.

- B. In fall 2019, the first iteration of **PUBH 200: Introduction to Public Humanities** "Listening to the Stories of the City" was taught by Minner and King. With funding from a Humanities Teaching Lab grant, we were able to bring in three class partners from Baltimore—Aaron Henkin and Jamyla Kremple from WYPR and Kevin Griffin Moreno from MICA—to work with the first cohort of students. Students organized a public panel with our partners in the Library Gallery on Tuesday, November 10. As part of the HT Lab grant for PUBH 200 in fall 2019, we worked with Dustin Roddy, a grad of our program and director of the New Media Studies, on a video on the first introduction to public humanities course. Shenita Denson, doctoral student in LLC and GA in AMST, will teach the inaugural 1-credit PUBH 301 methods lab course in spring 2020 and work with students on a spring public humanities event. The public humanities program is funded by CAHSS and the Dresher Center with administrative support and staffing by AMST.

- C. Furthering our focus on public humanities, the [*Baltimore Traces: Communities in Transition*](#) project has continued to develop (Item 6a) and provide students from across the university with public humanities experiences in Baltimore. *Traces* has worked on cultural documentation projects in Baltimore, including public history zines, digital walking tours, podcasts, and short documentaries. Since CAHSS opened its downtown classroom in the Lion Brothers Building (Item 6c) in 2017, AMST/*Traces* courses engaged in public humanities work have collaborated with the Southwest Partnership on its Stories from Sowebo initiative. AMST *Traces* courses have included [Learning From Lexington](#) (2017), [A Journey Through Hollins](#) (2018), and [A Walk Down West Baltimore Street](#) (2019), a collaboration with Media & Communication Studies funded by a CAHSS Grant for Pedagogy and Teaching. Dr. Sarah Fouts is planning a *Baltimore Traces* ethnography seminar connecting food justice organizations in New Orleans and Baltimore for spring 2020. For more on Baltimore Traces see: <https://baltimoretraces.umbc.edu/>. The National Humanities Alliance's [Humanities For All Project](#) has highlighted *Baltimore Traces* and its connection of five core types of

engagement in public humanities, including engaged teaching, engaged research, outreach through a variety of media, engaged public programming, and the “infrastructure of engagement.”

- D. Public Humanities work in AMST has also been supported by the department’s **Orser Center for the Study of Place, Community, and Culture** (Item 6c). The Center has been an organizer and foundational sponsor of the annual [Bmore Historic](#) unconference, a participant-led unconference for people who care about public history and historic preservation in and around Baltimore that draws over 100 participants annually. The Orser Center brings scholars from UMBC and various universities and organizations across the city together to think together about how best to build capacity for ethical and impactful public humanities work. We recognize that historically institutions of higher education have been implicated in exploitative research and development initiatives in Baltimore and cities like it and strive for a new vision of more equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships. The Orser Center expanded its advisory committee in 2019 and convened a sub-committee to develop a new strategic plan and to build a potential summer institute on ethical research practices focused on Baltimore. We plan programming and fundraising around the Orser Center’s 10th anniversary in November 2020. For more on the Orser Center and its advisory committee see: <http://amstcommunitystudies.org/>.

Work on *Baltimore Traces*, the Public Humanities program, and the Orser Center were all central is a recent Officer’s Grant “Strengthening UMBC’s Public Humanities Infrastructure: The Baltimore Field School” CAHSS submitted to the Mellon Foundation with our dean, Scott Casper, as PI and AMST chair Nicole King as co-PI. In conclusion, the Department of American Studies has worked collaboratively across departments and programs to build an infrastructure for interdisciplinary teaching and research in public humanities that has achieved both regional and national acclaim.

Faculty Development

Collaboratively developing a renewed vision and identity for the future of AMST is a major priority for the department, which has included discussing a name change such as American & Ethnic Studies and refocusing the AAS minor accordingly. In summer 2019, senior leadership completed a full revision of the Department’s Faculty Handbook, including service clusters for new faculty and a mentoring plan (Item 4). We shared these documents with incoming faculty at our Departmental Summer Retreat. Since the new language on community-engaged scholarship was approved by UMBC’s Faculty Senate, we also revised our P&T guidelines to incorporate community-engaged scholarship and public humanities research and teaching. During this time, we have also revised our department workload policy. AMST does an extensive amount of work with students from across campus beyond teaching our basic load and extensive diversity work that often goes without compensation or credit. Over the next three-years, senior leadership will work with our new faculty to develop a renewed vision for our curriculum, a plan for growth, and a new hiring plan. The model of leadership in AMST is radical transparency and participation from all faculty members on departmental decisions.

2. Major Challenges

AMST has been an incubator for new programs and an exemplary collaborator across silos at UMBC and beyond. In the process of creating new and innovative programs/departments, we are constantly tasked

with reinventing our own department and not duplicating the departments incubated here in AMST. Sustaining and growing the number of AMST majors (Item 2) is a project the senior leadership will work on with our new faculty. However, we want to remain a small student-centered department that works collaboratively with the growing number of interdisciplinary departments and programs on campus. Our number of majors has remained consistent at around 20 to 25 students since our last APR. Our ideal would be 40 to 60 majors with sustainable numbers of minors in AMST, PUBH, and AAST. We hope to address the relatively obscure identity of AMST as a major choice for incoming freshmen and/or 1st year transfers and develop new promotional materials. During our summer retreat, Ashley Minner led the faculty in an exercise to think about our new logo and identity. AMST is working on a plan for promoting a stronger understanding of the field of American studies and public humanities work at UMBC.

3. Resources Required

To continue our excellent work, we need resources in two main areas:

1. The conversion of the professor of the practice position to a tenure-track line in the department. This conversion would address a glaring gap at our university in the field of Native American studies and bring together indigenous studies, urban studies, ethnography, and public humanities as key fields in our departmental and university programming, curriculum, and scholarly production. Furthermore, the conversion of this line to a tenure track position would provide the professor in this position with a multi-year career track that would make research and publication an integral part of their work.
2. Administrative support (program management specialist) for our two minors and the Orser Center to help with public programming and grants administration integral to the development of community-based research.

The main areas needing resources are the new minors—the Public Humanities program and, upon a redesign, the Asian American Studies minor/program. It took us three-years of careful planning and consultation with experts inside and outside of the academy to build the public humanities minor. We envision the next three-years as a thoughtful and deliberate model of growth for Public Humanities at UMBC. This process will be inclusive of both the AMST faculty and advisory committees with members from across CAHSS. We will need further administrative support to handle public programming and to manage future grants and outside resources.

4. Enrollment Growth - Revenue Generating Strategies

We are focused on developing a strategy for enrollment growth with our new faculty. This work will be informed by the American Studies Association's working paper, [Some Best Practices for Recruiting Students to American Studies Programs](#).

We do not see revenue generation or fundraising as a central goal of the Department of American Studies or any academic department at a public and not-for-profit university. Our mission and vision focus on the highest quality of humanities teaching and research that makes a real impact in our society. However, the work of the chair of American Studies does include maintaining and growing the Department's foundation account and the Orser Center endowment.