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Name of Unit: Border, Transnational, and Cross-Cultural Studies

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Current units to be re-organized/consolidated:

N/A
The Border, Transnational, and Cross-Cultural Studies Initiative

This paper proposes an intellectual amalgamation that facilitates and maximizes existing faculty synergies across colleges, disciplines and units on campus. It is an effort to set new directions, to align people and their ideas, and to motivate proactive change in our institutional setting.

In what follows, the paper addresses:

- A) How this amalgamation advances, and strengthens the relationship between the University of Arizona, hemispheric border zones, and transnational collaborations;
- B) How this merging of synergies re-positions our institution as a top player in a global, bi-national, and regional sphere; and
- C) Economic, intellectual and curricular benefits and projected efficiencies resulting from this effort, as well as its contributions to diversity.

A) The University of Arizona’s Border, Transnational, and Cross-Cultural Studies Initiative is a multi-layered enterprise that galvanizes inter-disciplinary research by faculty members from a variety of disciplines across campus. The primary aim of this collective endeavor is to investigate fundamental processes linked to borders, globalization and their effects on geopolitical structures, local communities and traditions, as well as cultural representations. Although our research centers on the effects of these practices in the Americas, our approaches and interests encompass an international or planetary perspective.

The Initiative closely adheres to the aims and objectives stated in the UA Strategic Plan, and it connects strongly with the plan’s strategic directions, in particular with the following guiding principle: “Provide World-Class Research That Improves the Human Condition in Arizona and Beyond”

Our aim is to offer a broad and comparative academic experience that achieves a balance between theory and praxis, emphasizes critical thinking, and fosters multidisciplinary and transnational collaboration. The University’s strategic location (sixty miles from the Mexican border) offers a wide range of opportunities to undertake research projects and community interaction in an international and multilingual setting. In the same fashion, we recognize the importance of border communities where indigenous languages as well as English and Spanish are expressions of the Southwest and its cultural heritage. We aspire to have both our faculty and students become first rate researchers and educators who can contribute to a better...
understanding of border dynamics at the local, hemispherical and global levels.

B) Our mid-term goal is to implement a Center for Border, Hemispheric, Transnational and Cross-Cultural Studies that will draw together colleagues across units, will eventually achieve degree granting status, and will be comprised of three interrelated research clusters: cultural, media and literary studies; indigenous knowledge, migration, technology and society; and cross-disciplinary comparative studies that offer research opportunities in such areas as local and regional environmentalism, bio-politics, and biotechnology. Faculty members would have the flexibility to work in one, two or all three of the clusters. The curriculum, both graduate and undergraduate, will echo research projects that explore and interrogate themes such as globalization in the Americas, migrations and forced displacements, diasporic cultures, the relationship between borders, states and nations, binational environmental aspects, cultures and languages in contact, indigenous knowledge, local and regional representations of the border, and transnational subjects, among others.

C) The Center would offer a GIDP, and an undergraduate interdisciplinary major that would prepare and train students to become active participants in both the private and the public sector. By merging existing intellectual and human resources from several units on campus, the Center will be a catalyst for the planning and fruition of multidisciplinary collaboration that should in turn result in grant proposals and agency specific projects.

The Center also aims to bridge research efforts between colleagues and investigators from the U.S. and Latin America, in particular from Mexico. To this end, we foresee the Center working closely with the UA Office of Western Hemispherical Programs. There are a number of projects, agreements and collaborations that could greatly benefit from a re-conceptualization of their efforts. For instance, there are border related projects developed at the university level: a Ph.D emphasis in Border Studies housed in the Dept of Spanish and Portuguese, a Binational Migration Institute affiliated with Mexican American Studies Research Center, a U.S.-Mexico Binational Center for Environmental Sciences and Toxicology, the Southwest Center for Community Health Promotion (SWCCHP), and a Center for Border Security and Immigration attached to the Eller College, yet there is no direct or formal collaboration among these three entities at this time. Moreover, the Center aspires to become a clearinghouse that guides and promotes transnational funding generating mechanisms.

At the national level, the center is well positioned to compete for several grants and funding resources such those from the Dept of Education Title VI, Dept of Homeland Security, Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education (FIPSE), in particular their Program for North American Mobility in Higher Education, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Science Foundation, USAID, in particular their U.S.-Mexico TIES Partnership Program, Social Science Research Council, Smithsonian Institute, and from foundations such as Ford, Hewlett, Mellon, and Rockefeller. The estimated range of potential and immediately viable funding at this level is between 1.5-4 million dollars. Moreover, on the Mexican side, CONACYT has formally expressed its interest in funding the creation at the University of Arizona of a Binational Border mechanism aimed at supporting student and faculty exchanges, seed money for border collaborative research, events and publications. Potential matching support from NSF is being explored. Two elements were crucial in choosing the University of Arizona to host such an initiative: our research border strengths, and the interdisciplinary approach that the University is engaging in. In parallel, the University is participating in the creation of a U.S.-Mexico Binational Border Forum which is aimed at supporting collaborative research in the areas of sustainable energy, economic development and human interactions in the border. This network is being co-convened with Rice University, Texas A&M University, ITESM, University of Monterrey, ITAM and University of the Americas.

At the state level we are facing an ever-decreasing financial support for higher education. As a land-grant institution, the UA’s first responsibility is to serve the citizens of Arizona. It is estimated that by 2014, 54% of Arizona high school graduates will be ethnic minorities, 75% of
which will be of Hispanic origin\(^2\). Yet currently Latino students represent only 13.7% of the student population at UA. Nonetheless, the UA is well positioned to become the first Research I Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in the nation. This is a designation of the Department of Education, originally through Title III legislation in 1992 (now Title V), for those 2- and 4-year public institutions of higher education that have at least a 25% Hispanic, full-time undergraduate enrollment, of which 50% or more must be low-income students. HIS’s access to higher education function cannot be underestimated. For example, HSIs account for only about 6% of all postsecondary institutions, and are mostly community and state colleges, but enroll nearly 50% of all Hispanic college students, which denotes their importance.\(^3\)

Thus, it is critically important that UA reflect the demographics of our community. A core goal of the Border, Transnational, and Cross-Cultural Studies Center is to work toward that objective and in the process strengthen the diversity of our university. A cornerstone of our proposed center would be our commitment to translational aspects of our research. In other words, we believe that our research findings have to translate into educational and policy processes that must positively impact our communities. To do so we would work closely with the UA academic advising centers and admissions office in order to strengthen our recruitment, retention and graduation rates of students, especially with regard to underrepresented or economically disadvantaged groups. Faculty, graduate and undergraduate students will be able to take part in UA outreach efforts in area schools such as the award winning College Academy for Parents (CAP), designed to help parents of ethnic minority, low-income students prepare their children for higher education, or CEMELA, the Center for the Mathematics Education of Latinos or SOAR, the Student Opportunity for Academic Renewal. The Center would also strengthen UA connections to Pima and Cochise Community Colleges in an effort to create a clear, direct and unobstructed path for underrepresented or economically disadvantaged students to complete a Bachelors degree at UA.

To summarize, the Border, Transnational, and Cross-Cultural Studies Initiative will:

- Advance, and strengthen the relationship between the University of Arizona, hemispherical border zones, and transnational collaborations
- Position our institution as a top player in a global, bi-national, and regional sphere
- Maximize existing economic, intellectual and curricular resources related to the study of the border so that they effectively contribute to diversity and to an eventual HSI designation.


\(^3\) the complete report is available here: http://www.ed.arizona.edu/adaa/HSI.htm