

New Brunswick Strategic Planning Proposal

Proposal Title: Rethinking Area Studies

Proposal Initiator: Richard Schroeder, Professor and Chair, Geography, SAS, RU-NB

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Primary Strategic Priority/Foundational Element/Integrating Theme Addressed

- Envision Tomorrow's University
- Build Faculty Excellence
- Transform the Student Experience
- Enhance Our Public Prominence
- Strong Core of Sciences and Humanities
- Inclusive, Diverse, and Cohesive Culture
- Effective and Efficient Infrastructure and Staff
- Financial Resources Sufficient to Fund Our Aspirations
- Robust Shared Governance, Academic Freedom, and Effective Communication
- Cultures, Diversity, and Inequality—Local and Global
- Improving the Health and Wellness of Individuals and Populations
- Creating a Sustainable World through Innovation, Engineering, and Technology
- Educating Involved Citizens and Effective Leaders for a Dynamic World
- Creative Expression and the Human Experience
- Measuring Progress and Defining Success

Proposal Abstract:

The renewed commitment to the study of “Cultures, Diversity and Inequality – Local and Global” enshrined in the university’s recently adopted strategic plan represents an important opportunity for Rutgers’ area studies community to revitalize itself through new programs and initiatives. At the same time, both area studies units and a number of inter-related language, literature and cultural studies departments and programs have struggled of late to absorb budget cuts and declining enrollments. In this context, the need to explore creative ways to continue to meet the area studies mission and build the necessary institutional framework to do so at Rutgers could hardly be more pressing.

This proposal features a year-long program designed to facilitate cross-regional conversations among faculty and students affiliated with existing area studies programs at Rutgers and explore potential opportunities for collaboration around select themes. The program consists of five parts: 1) a symposium exploring the state of the art of conventional area studies; 2) a symposium exploring alternative approaches that move beyond the conventional area studies emphasis on geographic regions; 3) a campus-wide colloquium series featuring six guest lecturers representing cutting edge area studies scholarship; 4) a junior scholars conference; and 5) a strategic planning workshop. The latter will engage the leaders of the area studies community in the task of developing a campus wide strategy for strengthening area studies scholarship and programming at Rutgers over the next five years.

Full Proposal Description: “Rethinking Area Studies”¹

I. Introduction

The renewed commitment to the study of “Cultures, Diversity and Inequality – Local and Global” enshrined in the university’s recently adopted strategic plan represents an important opportunity for Rutgers’ area studies community to revitalize itself through new programs and initiatives. At the same time, both area studies units and a number of inter-related language, literature and cultural studies departments and programs have struggled of late to absorb budget cuts and declining enrollments. In this context, the need to explore creative ways to continue to meet the area studies mission and build the necessary institutional framework to do so at Rutgers could hardly be more pressing.

The proposed year-long program will facilitate cross-regional conversations among faculty and students affiliated with existing area studies programs with an eye towards identifying potential opportunities for collaboration around select themes. It will engage the leaders of the area studies community in the task of developing a campus wide strategy for strengthening area studies scholarship and programming over the next five years, all while building on the University’s recent success in the internationalization of its curriculum and related student services.²

Thus, in addition to addressing the strategic priority of: “Cultures, Diversity and Inequality – Local and Global”, the proposed program will also address several other priorities/foundations/and themes, including: 1) Envision Tomorrow’s University; 2) Build Faculty Excellence; 3) Transform the Student Experience; and 4) Educating Involved Citizens and Effective Leaders for a Dynamic World.

II. The Program

The proposed program is comprised of five parts. All events will be prominently advertised in existing area studies courses to maximize co-curricular learning.

A. Thinking the Region

There is a long-standing regional studies tradition in Geography and cognate disciplines that draws on, but is simultaneously distinct from, the bounded “continental” land units that form the focus of traditional area studies scholarship. Regional studies specialists have consistently explored the relative degree of fixity and fluidity inherent in particular regional constellations, drawing attention to pressures and forces that hold regions together, or, alternatively, tear them apart. They have also examined the relationship between discursive regional formations and their material referents. The first part of the proposed program will accordingly feature a symposium comprised of a series of panel discussions that will be designed to bring these regional shaping forces to the fore. Featuring representatives of Rutgers’ different area studies units, the panels will focus on the

¹ The title of this program is borrowed from a national initiative run by the Ford Foundation in the late 1990s. The Rutgers Center for African Studies received a \$120,000 grant from this program to underwrite a scholars-in-residence program for distinguished African women and an annual thematic program exploring the making of African cities.

² Specifically, the 2014 Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization efforts from the NAFSA: Association of International Educators, which was recently awarded to the GAIA Centers.

different ways cultural, political-economic, environmental, and other factors animate teaching, research, and applied scholarship within the existing area studies fields.

B. Beyond Traditional Area Studies

Rutgers has a long and distinguished tradition of fostering collaborative efforts by faculty who have broken the conventional area studies mold through programs such as the Black Atlantic, the African, Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Literatures Department, the Critical Caribbean Studies Initiative, and thematic programs run through the Center for Historical Analysis, the Center for Cultural Analysis, the Institute for Research on Women, and the Center for Race and Ethnicity. A second symposium will explore ways to continue this tradition by focusing attention on alternative ways of imagining area studies, either through reconfigured regions (Pacific Rim, Indian Ocean, “Polar Studies”) or cross cutting thematic emphases (e.g. the “emergent” economies of the BRICSA countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa).

C. Campus-wide Area Studies Colloquium Series: Models of Innovative Area Studies Scholarship

Six speakers whose research interests reflect cutting edge area studies scholarship would be invited to address the Rutgers area studies community. Drawn at least in part from peer institutions in the CIC, the speakers will each represent a different region or area. In addition to presenting their own work, these scholars will share insights from their experiences in fostering the area studies tradition on their home campuses.

D. Area Studies Junior Scholars Conference. Drawing on a model successfully implemented in the Geography Department in recent years, graduate students representing campus area studies programs will be granted the opportunity to organize a junior scholars conference devoted to Area Studies. This event will feature the students’ own work and the work of up to half a dozen invited outside guests.

E. Area Studies Planning Workshop: The Future of Area Studies at Rutgers

This self-styled “summit” will engage the leaders of the area studies community at Rutgers in a day-long year-end strategic planning workshop to develop a plan for revitalizing area studies that would relate specifically to the goals laid out in the University’s strategic plan and build on the insights gleaned over the course of the year. This plan will feature new forms of collaboration between units, specific programming goals to be undertaken within a five year timeframe, targets for fund-raising, etc.

III. Budget: \$38,000

\$3000: campus wide symposia [Thinking the Region; Beyond Traditional Area Studies] two @ \$1500; catering, venue

\$15000: invited speakers [Models of Innovative Area Studies Scholarship]; six @ \$2500; honoraria, travel costs, meals, receptions, venue

\$9000: junior scholars conference; travel costs, meals, receptions, venue

\$1000: planning workshop [The Future of Area Studies at Rutgers]; catering, venue

\$10000: graduate assistant to help coordinate logistics, publicity, event planning, etc. (10 months @ 40 hour/month @ \$25/hour)

The Geography Department and participating units will contribute significant staff time and logistical support to ensure the success of the proposed program.

IV. Potential Collaborating Units:

This proposal was primarily developed by Richard Schroeder, Professor and Chair of Geography. The list of potential collaborating units is quite large, and includes the following:

Area Studies Programs:

Center for African Studies; Critical Caribbean Studies Initiative; European Studies; Latin American Studies; Middle Eastern Studies; South Asian Studies; etc.

Departments/Programs:

African, Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Literatures; Africana Studies; Anthropology; Art History; Asian Languages and Cultures; Comparative Literature; French; Geography; German; History; Human Ecology; Italian; Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies; Political Science; Spanish and Portuguese; etc.

Proposed Measures to Mark Progress or Determine Success:

As noted above, the principal outcome of this initiative, and a key marker of its success will be the development of a detailed multi-year strategic plan outlining a program of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular programming related to the broad mission of international and area studies at Rutgers. This plan will be shared with the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs; the New Brunswick Campus Provost; the Executive and Vice Deans of SAS; the Associate Dean of SAS in charge of International Programs; the Vice President of Global Programs; and members of the participating units. A second marker of success will be the level of attendance at lectures and participation in workshops and planning exercises by faculty members affiliated with the units listed above; graduate students in related academic fields; and undergraduate students enrolled in relevant area studies courses. Detailed logs of participation/attendance will be kept for each event funded under this initiative.