

RAE 2001 Overview Report UoA 45 American Studies

Working methods

The panel followed the working methods outlined in its criteria. The panel reviewed all research outputs and examined virtually all of them in detail at least once, and a minimum of 25% at least twice.

General Observations : Strengths, weaknesses and activity of the research areas submitted

The Americas Panel, including Canada and the Caribbean, worked well as an Areas study unit with some overlapping areas of expertise as between Latin Americanists and other regions covered.

A preliminary caveat is in order. Because of the disaggregated nature of many North American and Latin American Studies programmes (with active researchers being submitted to History, Politics, English, Film, Iberian and other panels) the American Studies panel did not see a substantial proportion of the work actually being carried out in the area. The quality of the work which was seen, however, was often very high, as reflected in the grades, and the assessment drew upon all the expertise of a very broad, interdisciplinary panel. There is, however, a real danger that UoAs do not map onto the actual academic departments that exist in institutions. Only 2 of the 5 established institutes of LAS (London, Liverpool, Oxford, Cambridge, Essex) made a submission, the remainder having their staff assessed by single discipline-based panels (often an institutional decision). No submissions were received from Scotland or Northern Ireland and only one from Wales, despite vibrant research communities in these areas. The number of submissions (though not the high quality of those submitting) thus gives a misleading impression of the health of study of the Americas in the UK. The panel are concerned to emphasise this point, particularly in relation to other funding bodies (AHRB, ESRC, charitable foundations) which may otherwise have a false perception of the size and activity of the field. It should be noted that there are some 40 American Studies programmes in British Universities, all staffed by research active individuals.

United States and Canada

On the whole the panel considered that it remained optimistic about the trend of North American Studies in Britain. Panel members with experience of the preceding RAE commented that some departments had been revitalised, others had more than held their own, and some had forged ahead triumphantly. In general, the standard of research activity had risen. There remained a relatively small amount of activity in Canadian Studies. As compared with the previous exercise, the panel noted a diminishing level of activity in research in 19th century literature and history, and some signs of an avoidance of canonical literary texts not only in the 19th century but in the first half of the 20th. Perhaps as important (with some notable exceptions) was an unwillingness to consider the new canons and fields in relation to preceding traditions, or to found research on the formal features of literary texts. (It may be that researchers with interests in canonical authors were more often referred as part of "English" submissions.) Specific new points of growth were detected in popular culture and music, though the major increase in activity was in Film, Media and Cultural Studies. (The panel noted, however, that the interest in cultural studies and

film was not accompanied by work on disciplinary conceptualisation.) There was an increasing tendency for some scholars not to be purists but to submit some items which were not exclusively Americanist in cast, or which were interested in Anglo-American or Cis- or Circum-Atlantic areas. Research in American Studies is moving productively across national boundaries, in response to a paradigm shift within the field.

Latin American Studies

There is a marked contrast between the disciplinary basis of US/Canadian Studies, which is primarily based in history, literature, and cultural studies, and Latin American & Caribbean Studies, which contains all of these but a range of social sciences as well. Indeed, the preponderance of work in LAS is in the social sciences (including social science based history). The submissions from Latin Americanists to this panel were fewer in number than for RAE 5 and represented only a small proportion of the work carried out in the UK by Latin American specialists. The IlaS Handbook of Latin Americanists published in 1997 lists 382 active in the UK. The work submitted by Latin Americanists to this panel was dominated by social science and history with little work represented in film and culture more broadly. The relatively small number of submissions means that the results of this panel cannot be seen as representative of the range of Latin American studies in the UK. (This does not of course mean that the work submitted to other panels is necessarily of lower quality.) While there was a range of interdisciplinary work, there was comparatively little that crossed the area boundaries, though what was submitted was generally of high quality.

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