



American Civilization
Box 1892
Providence, RI 02912
TEL: 401 863-2896
FAX: 401 863- 1385
Memorandum

To: Rajiv Vohra, Dean of the Faculty

From: Robert Lee, Chair, Department of American Civilization

Re: Request for Name Change

Date: November 9, 2010

The Department of American Civilization seeks permission to change its name to The Department of American Studies. American Studies better represents the breadth of scholarship of our faculty and graduate students as well as the curriculum we offer to our undergraduate students. American Studies is the term immediately recognizable to colleagues, students, and interested laypersons. It is the term that is normally used to designate the interdisciplinary field by various professional associations, including the American Studies Association (the primary scholarly group which publishes the journal of record, *American Quarterly*) and in the recent NRC rankings. Our faculty and graduate students already participate in professional associations and conferences for 'American Studies'. The name 'American Studies' will be a more recognizable and easily accessible to potential graduate and undergraduate applicants browsing for our department website.

Traditionally, the title 'American Civilization' was used for interdisciplinary programs that focused primarily on American literature and history, as was the case at Brown, when the PhD. Program in American Civilization was founded in 1945. Since the 1960's, the field of American Studies, the rubric now used by nearly all of our peer departments, has gone beyond American literature and history and draws from, and contributes to, social science disciplines (e.g. sociology and anthropology), ethnic studies, gender studies, media studies, and science studies. In the past decades, the

Brown department has played a critical role in the development of women's, gender and sexuality studies, ethnic and race studies, and urban studies nationally.

Faculty and graduate students in the department publish in a wide range of disciplinary venues and four of the Ph.D. dissertations completed in this department have won the American Studies Association's Ralph Henry Ellison Gabriel Prize, awarded to the best doctoral dissertation in American Studies, Ethnic Studies, or Women's Studies. Faculty members in the department have joint appointments with English, History, Ethnic Studies, Africana Studies, and Urban Studies and it has long been the norm for our graduate students to work with faculty across the disciplines. Currently, preliminary exam and dissertation committees include faculty members from departments ranging from Modern Culture and Media to Molecular and Cell Biology. In recent years, the Department of American Civilization has entered a new phase that continues work in these fields and expands its commitment to global and international contextualization, public engagement, and new media understandings. The Department has begun a new MA in Public Humanities and based our revitalized undergraduate curriculum on the idea of a publically engaged scholarship. Our department's commitment to drawing from a range of methodologies and practices in the study of the American experience is reflected in the most recent undergraduate curriculum revision approved by the College Curriculum Committee last Spring. The revision stresses four broad interdisciplinary themes (social structures and practices of identity; space and place; production of culture and consumption; and science, technology, and everyday life) and four interdisciplinary approaches (cultural/social analysis, global/international contextualization, new media understandings, and publicly engaged scholarship).

Faculty and students have together pioneered new avenues in transnational research, exploring the role of the United States in the world and the importance of the world in the United States, and expanded our research and teaching into digital scholarship. This Fall the Department received approval to develop a Masters program that will train international students in American Studies.

For these reasons, we believe that American Studies is a broader and more nuanced rubric, widely used in the field, that more accurately describes the mission of the department and the broad range of work engaged in by the faculty and students in the Department of American Civilization.