Summary of Recommended Actions for Ratification in Faculty Retreat II
October 22, 2009
Potential Actions resulting from deliberations in Retreat I, September 17, 2009
(Evaluation of Academic Programs and Curricula)

Undergraduate Programs: Potential actions: (1) reduce coursework requirement to 15 credits; (2) count towards the requirement courses with significant LAC content (but less than the current restriction of 100%) from across the university; (3) require language proficiency to achieve individualized objectives without an arbitrary credit minimum*; (4) require credit-bearing LAC experiential or service learning abroad or service learning activity in the LAC diasporas; and (5) encourage multiple experiential, service learning episodes or research endeavors abroad, making this a funding priority.

[*While measuring language proficiency may not yet be broadly available and reliable for massive use, the desired outcome is the learner’s ability to interact with native speakers with sufficient ease to overcome the linguistic and cultural barriers that otherwise hamper effective communication. This standard is empirical and can be unambiguously ascertained.]

Recommendation for ratification: requirements for undergraduate specialization.

1. Demonstrated language proficiency for individualized objectives. Language study with service-learning abroad is encouraged.
2. 15 credits of course work about or pertinent to LAC in accordance with individualized learning objectives and approved by a LAC advisor. At least one credit-earning experiential learning course (abroad, diasporic), supervised by a LAC faculty member, is required. Multiple experiences recommended. A minimum of two semesters of enrollment in the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Seminar (1 credit each).
3. An honors thesis or senior thesis supervised by a LAC faculty member is encouraged.

Graduate Program: Potential actions: certificate in LAC studies: (1) assess language competency ignoring arbitrary credit restrictions; (2) eliminate arbitrary 16-credit coursework requirement, substituting it with (3) required committee member from LAC core faculty who would guide LAC experience and content in accordance with student objectives and to assess (4) a required chapter or major thesis section targeting LAC content or application.

Recommendation for ratification: requirements for graduate specialization.

1. Demonstrated language proficiency for individualized objectives. Language study with service-learning abroad is encouraged.
2. The student’s graduate advisory committee must include a LAC faculty member. This LAC studies committee member is responsible for recommending appropriate course and thesis work with LAC content in accordance with student objectives.
3. The thesis or dissertation must contain at least one major section or chapter devoted to a LAC issue or topic.
Identifying the Curricular Gaps: Experiential Learning

*Fundamental problem.* Area and thematic studies programs (under International Studies and Programs) cannot offer their “own” courses or academic fields of study (although ESPP was invited to do so 6 yr ago with high-level administrative support).

*Overlooked opportunities.* There is keen need to equip students to deal with cultural awareness and diversity in the US. Actions could include revised curricula to focus on LAC content while also fulfilling integrative studies requirements.

- **Language.** Review and revision is urgently needed in the undergraduate curriculum in Spanish. It is too passive-learning oriented, focusing on traditional, literature-oriented and outdated learning materials. Skill sets and language and cultural competencies of students are insufficient for domestic (e.g., public school teaching) and international markets. The curriculum requires enrichment for broader cultural diversity (less ethnocentrism).

- Spanish language instruction is too classroom-based and textbook-oriented. Emphasis is needed on more interactive mechanisms by incorporating active (experiential and service-oriented) learning opportunities into the curriculum.

- A priority need is to incorporate into the curriculum language diversity of the Americas (e.g., indigenous, Anglophone, Francophone, and Caribbean languages).

- **Study Abroad.** Currently, there are 36 programs in LAC with costs that are generally less than for other regions. Most programs are faculty-led, short-term, and topically-focused. Issues identified included:

  - In response to the 2007 admonition to US universities by the Modern Language Association, how can we better prepare students and better conduct Michigan State study abroad experiences to avoid unanticipated outcomes? (Such outcomes include students returning home with views that are yet more culturally insensitive and ethnocentric than before their travel.) Effectively constituting and facilitating a viable group dynamic is likely to be an important component of this enterprise. Facilitating peer learning by mixing undergraduate and graduate students is a goal.

**Potential action.** Designate a choice set of most recommendable experiential learning options that also incorporate problem-solving (research) activities. Encourage students to participate through a multi-episode experiential portfolio. Cross-list (and negotiate content of) key courses with LAC content.

**Recommendation for ratification.** Establish a “most recommendable” set of study abroad courses for students in the LAC specialization (and major). Constituent courses would include: Experience Latin America (I and II), Community Engagement Service Learning in Peru, Rainforests and Reality (Nicaragua), options in Brazil and in the Caribbean (e.g., Jamaica, Dominican Republic).