American Studies

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The American Studies program encourages the interdisciplinary study of the cultures and politics of the United States, the changing representations of national identity, and the construction of borderland and diasporic cultures over time. Each student in the major combines courses in American Studies with courses from other relevant disciplines (literature, history, the arts, and the social sciences) to explore these broad topics from local, national, and global perspectives. Through the selection of an area of concentration, each student develops a focus for course work in the major. The program encourages scholarly work in nontraditional combinations of disciplines; at the same time, however, it assumes and requires a substantial foundation of knowledge in the history and culture of the United States. Students interested in the major are encouraged to consult with the director of undergraduate studies (DUS) as early as possible.

Requirements of the Major

All students majoring in American Studies must take fourteen term courses approved by the program’s faculty. Although a good deal of freedom in course selection is permitted, it is expected that all students will acquaint themselves with the materials, skills, and perspectives of cultural studies. Accordingly, the major requires completion – preferably by the end of the sophomore year, but no later than the end of the junior year – of at least four gateway courses (AMST 111–299), including two in cultural history/cultural studies, one broad survey course in American literature, and one course preparatory for work in the student’s area of concentration, to be selected in consultation with the DUS. One of these four courses must be listed as an “Early Americas” course on the American Studies website. Students may, with DUS permission, substitute a First-Year Seminar for a gateway course. An additional five concentration courses from diverse disciplines must be taken for a letter grade, one of which must incorporate a comparable topic from a non-U.S. perspective. Two electives chosen from the American Studies course offerings are also required.

Students must take two junior seminars (AMST 300–399) during their junior year. At least one of the seminars must fall within the student’s area of concentration, described below. In each of the seminars, students are expected to demonstrate proficiency in interdisciplinary research and analysis through the production of critical essays on primary source materials or a paper of fifteen to twenty pages. Sophomores contemplating a junior term abroad are urged to take one of the junior seminars in the spring term of their sophomore year.

Areas of Concentration Each American Studies major selects an area of concentration, normally in the fall of the junior year, from six possible choices: (1) national formations, (2) the international United States, (3) material cultures and built environments, (4) politics and American communities, (5) visual, audio, literary, and performance cultures, and (6) public humanities. The concentration in national formations explores historic migrations, settlements, and encounters among peoples who have formed the American nation, with an emphasis on Native American history and the construction of America’s frontiers and borderlands. The international United States concentration focuses on historic and contemporary diasporas, the role of the United States outside its national borders, and the flows of American peoples, ideas, and goods throughout the globe. Students in the material cultures and built environments concentration examine the formation of the American landscape from the natural to the human-made, including the development of American architecture and the visual and decorative arts. The concentration in politics and American communities investigates the emergence of social groups and their political struggles at the local and national levels, emphasizing the themes of power, inequality, and social justice. Majors with a concentration in visual, audio, literary, and performance cultures study American consumer culture, popular culture, representations, and media in relation to U.S. literatures. Students in the public humanities concentration explore various forms of public intellectual engagement, including museum studies, documentary work, public history, digital humanities, and archival based work in the visual or performing arts; senior projects in this area may consist of works or productions beyond the traditional scholarly essay. Students may also petition the DUS to develop an independent concentration.

Roadmap See visual roadmap of the requirements.

Senior Requirement

During the senior year, each student in the major completes work in the area of concentration in one of three ways. First, the student may enroll in a senior seminar within the area of concentration (AMST 400–490). Students should apply interdisciplinary methods and undertake original research to produce a final paper of twenty to twenty-five pages. Students must complete all course requirements to fulfill the senior requirement. Students electing this option should submit the senior seminar registration form, signed by the seminar instructor, to the DUS.

Second, the student may complete a one-term senior project or essay (AMST 491). The product should be a thirty-page essay or its equivalent in another medium. To apply for admission to AMST 491, a student should submit a prospectus, signed by the faculty adviser, to the DUS.

Third, the student may enroll in the intensive major (AMST 493 and 494) and work independently for two terms. The intensive major offers an opportunity for significant original research leading to a substantial senior project. AMST 493, 494 carries two terms of credit; its final product should be a sixty-page essay or its equivalent in another medium. All students in the intensive major participate in a
yearlong proseminar on theory and methods. One term of the two-term project may count as a course in the area of concentration. To apply for admission to AMST 493 and 494, a student should submit a prospectus, signed by the faculty adviser, to the DUS.

As a multidisciplinary program, American Studies draws on the resources of other departments and programs in the University. The list of American Studies courses is meant to be suggestive only: apart from those courses required for the major, it is neither restrictive nor exhaustive. Students are encouraged to examine the offerings of other departments in both the humanities and the social sciences, as well as Residential College Seminars, for additional relevant courses. The stated area of concentration of each student determines the relevance and acceptability of other courses.

ADVISING

Combined B.A./M.A. degree program Exceptionally able and well-prepared students may complete a course of study leading to the simultaneous award of the B.A. and M.A. degrees after eight terms of enrollment. See Academic Regulations, section K, Special Arrangements, “Simultaneous Award of the Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees.” Interested students should consult the DUS prior to the sixth term of enrollment for specific requirements in American Studies.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

Prerequisites None
Number of courses 14 term courses (incl senior req)
Distribution of courses 4 gateway courses, as specified; 2 junior sems, 1 in area of concentration; 5 courses in area of concentration for letter grades, 1 on a related non-U.S. topic, (1 may be one term of two-term senior project); 2 electives
Substitution permitted 1 first-year sem for 1 gateway course; others with DUS permission
Senior requirement Senior sem (AMST 400–490) or one-term senior project (AMST 491) related to area of concentration
Intensive major Same, except a two-term senior project (AMST 493 and 494) replaces senior sem (AMST 400–490) or AMST 491

The American Studies program examines, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the development and expression of national cultures and subcultures, as well as borderland and diasporic cultures. By means of a combination of gateway lecture courses, core seminars, American Studies courses, and courses from relevant disciplines (literature, history, the arts, and the social or behavioral sciences), students in the American Studies program explore diverse aspects of the American experience locally, nationally, and globally. Each student chooses one of six areas of concentration: national formations; the international United States; material cultures and built environments; politics and American communities; visual, audio, literary, and performance cultures; and public humanities.

In a typical year, introductory courses such as the following are offered:

- AMST 020, The Humanities from Plato to the Corporate University
- AMST 030, Cultures of Travel
- AMST 032, Gender, Sexuality, and U.S. Empire
- AMST 034, Country Music in America
- AMST 160, The Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery
- AMST 209, Race, Politics, and the Law

Courses such as these should provide interested first-year students the best possible acquaintance with the materials and methods of American Studies. American Studies seminars numbered under 100 are part of the First-Year Seminar program and are for first-year students only; some upper-level seminars are open to first-year students with advanced placement in the relevant subjects with the permission of the director of undergraduate studies (DUS).

For additional information, see the American Studies website.

FACULTY ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROGRAM OF AMERICAN STUDIES

Professors Ned Blackhawk (History), David Blight (History, African American Studies), Daphne Brooks (African American Studies, Theater Studies), Alicia Schmidt Camacho (Ethnicity, Race, & Migration), Hazel Carby (African American Studies), Edward Cooke, Jr. (History of Art), Michael Denning (Chair) (English, Ethnicity, Race, & Migration), Wai Chee Dimock (English), Kathryn Dudley (Anthropology), Roderick Ferguson (Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies), Joanne Freeman (History), Beverly Gage (History), Jacqueline Goldsby (English, African American Studies), Inderpal Grewal (Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, Anthropology), Matthew Jacobson (African American Studies, History), Kathryn Lofton (Religious Studies), Lisa Lowe (DGS), Mary Lui (History, Head of Timothy Dwight College), Joanne Meyerowitz (History), Charles Musser (Film & Media Studies), Tavia Nyong'o (Theater Studies), Gary Okihiro (Theater Studies), Stephen Pitti (History, Ethnicity, Race, & Migration, Head of Ezra Stiles College), Sally Promey (Divinity School, Religious Studies), Joanna Radin, (History of Medicine, Anthropology, History), Ana Ramos-Zayas (Ethnicity, Race, & Migration, Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies), Marc Robinson (Theater Studies, English), Paul Sabin (History, Environmental Studies), Caleb Smith (English), Robert Stepto (English, African American Studies), Harry Stout (Religious Studies, History), Michael Veal (Music, African American Studies), John Warner (History of Medicine, History), Michael Warner (English), Laura Wexler (Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies), Bryan Wolf

Associate Professors Rene Almeling (Sociology), Laura Barraclough (Ethnicity, Race, & Migrations), Crystal Feinsteiner (African American Studies), Zareena Grewal (Ethnicity, Race, & Migration, Religious Studies), Daniel HoSang (Ethnicity, Race, & Migration), Greta LaFleur
Assistant Professor Albert Laguna (Ethnicity, Race, & Migration)

Senior Lecturers  James Berger (DUS) (English), Karin Roffman (Humanities, English)

Lecturer  Ryan Brasseaux (Head of Davenport College)

First-Year Seminars Gateway Courses Junior Seminars Senior Seminars Special Projects and Senior Project