Why European Cultural Studies at Brandeis?

What was modernism? How do philosophy and literature relate? How are the humanities associated to other disciplines? Why is an “impractical” education in literature, art, music, and philosophy so important? These and many more questions are addressed in courses in European cultural studies at Brandeis. We offer students the unique opportunity to shape their own course of study within the traditional liberal arts framework.

Interdepartmental and Interdisciplinary

Eastern cultural studies (ECS) is unique because of its interdepartmental, interdisciplinary flexibility. Students have more freedom to choose courses and personalize their program of study because the courses can come from any department, not just one, as is ordinarily the case.

For example, a student interested in romanticism might take an English course on Byron; a German course on Goethe, a politics course on Rousseau, a philosophy course on Kant, a history course on the French Revolution, and a music course on Beethoven. All of these courses would count toward the major, even though each course is in a different department.

Curriculum Overview

ECS is, at its roots, a major in literary studies that seeks out links to other disciplines. It offers students the opportunity to select an area of study that cuts across conventional academic disciplines and national literatures. Moreover, it presents students with the chance to relate their literary interests to any nonliterary discipline that is relevant to their focus.

In order to earn a degree in ECS, students must complete the foundational course, ECS 100a, which focuses on the arts and literatures of the twentieth century, or ECS 100b, which deals with the dawn of the modern world. Once this requirement is met, the major is fulfilled with electives.

Electives for the ECS major are divided into literature and nonliterature coursework.

ECS students must take three courses in any European literature; these may be selected from courses taught in English, or from those taught in German, French, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Latin, Greek, or Hebrew. They may all fall within the same cultural area or from any mix of languages and cultures.

In order to emphasize the global dimension of the program, ECS majors also take at least two comparative literature courses. We particularly encourage those courses that link European culture to non-European literatures, politics, and art.
In addition, ECS students take at least three courses from areas outside of literature. The most common choices are history, philosophy, sociology, politics, fine arts, anthropology, psychology, and music. But in principle, any discipline is acceptable as long as it is relevant to the student’s individualized program.

Students who want to earn departmental honors must write a senior thesis. Those who opt out of a thesis must complete one additional course in any of the basic categories.

ECS strongly encourages the study of a foreign language, but the major does not have a foreign language requirement. Typically, ECS students do have command of one or more languages besides English.

Courses bearing the ECS designation are always taught in English. Courses taught in foreign languages have the prefix of that language or department. For example GER signifies a course taught in German; GECS signifies a German course taught in English.

**Who Majors in ECS?**

ECS attracts highly motivated, intellectually ambitious students with broad interests and an independent turn of mind. Because the major is not prepackaged into a set of required courses, each student works closely with the ECS coordinator to craft an individual curriculum—one that addresses the specific interests, needs, and goals of the student.

**Faculty**

Following is a list of faculty members and their areas of specialization:

- **Stephen Dowden**, coordinator and undergraduate advising head
  Modern German literature and culture, European modernism

- **Rudolph Binion**
  Modern history; culture and thought; psychohistory

- **Dian Fox**
  Early modern Spanish drama, poetry, and prose; women's and gender studies

- **Jane Hale**
  French, education, comparative literature, contemporary French fiction and drama

- **Gila Hayim**
  Classical and contemporary social theory, critical theory, social movements, existential sociology, legal studies, sociology of religion

- **Arthur Holmberg**
  Dramatic literature, theory and history, performance theory

- **Edward Kaplan**
  French romanticism, Michelet, Hugo, modern French poetry and theory, Baudelaire, Bonnefoy, religion and literature, translation

- **Jytte Klausen**
  Comparative politics, Western Europe, political economy of advanced industrial societies

- **Richard Lansing**
  Medieval Italian literature, Dante, comparative Renaissance literature, epic and romance

- **Robin Feuer Miller**
  The novel in Russia and Europe of the nineteenth century, the short story in Russia, the literature of childhood

- **Paul Morrison**
  Modernism, literary criticism and theory

- **Antony Polonsky**
  East European Jewish history, Holocaust studies

- **Michael Randall**
  Late medieval and Renaissance poetry, prose, and philosophy, Italian and comparative literature

- **Jerry Samet**
  Philosophy of mind, philosophy of psychology and cognitive science, history of philosophy

- **Nancy Scott**
  European and American art from the French Revolution to World War II