ABOUT THE PROGRAM
African, African-American and Caribbean thinkers have played a major role in defining the critical issues of our time, just as the cultures of Africans and their descendants have transformed the cultures of the Americas and the world. A concentration in African and Afro-American studies allows you to explore intellectual, cultural, economic, political, social and historical issues related to Africans and people of African descent. Courses are drawn from the humanities, social sciences and creative arts. Students will develop the analytical tools to read different kinds of texts, write persuasively and participate knowledgeably in debates about developments across the African continent, in the Americas and globally.

What makes the program distinctive?
Our faculty’s diverse interests give students a strong appreciation for why debates about the census and affirmative action, for instance, are as contentious in Brazil as they are in the United States. From electoral politics to fiction and film, you will develop a solid and interdisciplinary sense of both the inequalities that mark our past and present and the resources and strategies that have inspired transformation.

FAST FACTS

Current number of majors and minors: 28

Number of faculty: 6

Can you minor in this program? Yes

Emphasis within the major: Majors take courses that allow them to combine an interdisciplinary range with a four-course specialization that is either geographical or disciplinary.

Popular second majors: women’s, gender and sexuality studies; sociology; anthropology; international and global studies

Website: brandeis.edu/departments/ afroamerstudies
ACADEMICS AND RESEARCH

Senior theses
Recent majors have written senior theses titled “Native Tongues: A Dialogue Between Hip-Hop, Hiplife and Diaspora”; “Womanhood, Gender, Resistance and Authority in and Through Candomble of Salvador, Bahia”; and “Applying the [Science] Fiction: Blackness in the Global Future.”

Guest speakers
In addition to classroom learning, students gain from the presence of world-class experts on African and Afro-American studies who are invited to deliver lectures on campus every year. These lectures provide opportunities to see the richness of our academic resources and also allow students to exchange ideas with specialists and each other.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Distinguished faculty
Our faculty members have been awarded fellowships from the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research; the Kennedy School’s Taubman Center for State and Local Government, Harvard University; and the National Humanities Center. Other faculty members have taught in Salvador, Brazil, with the Fulbright Fellowship Program.

Student awards
Our graduating majors have been awarded the Richard Kaufman ’58 Memorial Prize, the Bruce R. Mayper Memorial Award, the Rose Schlow Award, Outstanding UDR Award, and Doris Brewer Cohen Award in Justice and Public Life.

In 2013, Hannah Young ’14 received Brandeis’ prestigious Sorensen Fellowship from the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life. For her internship, Young worked with Uganda Youth and Women’s Effort Fighting AIDS (UYWEFA) in Uganda. UYWEFA attempts to de-stigmatize poverty and HIV within its community. “This internship encouraged me to delve further into learning about what ‘development’ truly means, and how it is carried out throughout the world,” she reflected.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Art therapy in Ghana
Jessye Kass ’13 graduated summa cum laude from Brandeis, majoring in African and Afro-American studies and anthropology. While at Brandeis, she founded a small, arts-based nongovernmental organization in Accra, Ghana. The organization provided free therapeutic arts programming to children in underserved communities and thrived on an international volunteer presence. Kass had four Brandeis students intern with her. As she began to comprehend further the ethical concerns of volunteer organizations, she re-worked the organization to be sustainable within Ghana.

Gender dynamics in Uganda
While studying abroad in Africa, Ariela Alpert ’10 conducted independent research with women’s self-help groups in Uganda focusing on family planning and gender dynamics. Alpert’s goal was to help break the poverty cycle and catalyze development in the region, and her research concluded with specific plans to utilize new methods of family planning education within self-help groups.

Internships
AAAS students have interned both locally and globally. These locations include the U.S. (Boston, New York City, Atlanta), Haiti, Brazil and South Africa. Students apply to a wide range of sources to receive funding for internships that are unpaid. A World of Work (WOW) grant allowed Amanda Pereira ’15 to intern at Empowerment Through Education (ETE) Camp, a camp for children founded by Shaina Gilbert ’10 in Hinche, Haiti. ETE Camp seeks to prepare Hinche’s most vulnerable youth (over 150 participants) to become future community leaders for social change by strengthening their academic skills, increasing self-confidence, and actively building community and parental support.

Student clubs
AAAS majors can experience the field firsthand by joining groups like the African Dance Club, the African Students Organization, the Black Student Organization, the Mixed Heritage Club and Diverse City (which produces a culture, arts and ethnicity publication).

AFTER BRANDEIS

Diverse career fields
We are proud of all our graduates, some of whom have served in the Peace Corps, Teach For America and Operation Crossroads Africa. Some have gone on to pursue graduate degrees in social anthropology and other fields, and to careers in social work, education and law — for example, one graduate works with the Chelsea, Mass., District Courts. Other recent alumni have gone on to work at The New England Journal of Medicine, MIT’s School of Engineering and the Genetics Institute, among other settings.

Notable alumni
Jhana Senxian ’98 — who as an undergraduate mounted a very successful conference on complexion and colorism, with papers presented by faculty of Brandeis as well as other Greater Boston-area institutions — is president and chief executive officer of Sustainability Guild International. She founded the organization to help create sustainable paths to revitalizing business, government, nonprofit and educational organizations.