

Why American Studies at Brandeis?

American Studies takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the culture, society, public policies, ethnicities, institutions, values, behavior, expressive repertoire, identities, and traditions of Americans in all their variety. Using subject matter central to the field—including intellectual, political, and social history; media studies; environmental studies; ethnic and immigration studies; women’s and gender studies; and art and music, among others—the major is designed to provide students with an educated awareness of the way America, particularly the United States, frames the public and private lives, aspirations, and self-understandings of its peoples.

Curriculum Overview

The major requires nine courses:

- AMST 10a Foundations of American Civilization
- AMST 100a Classic Texts in American Culture to 1900
- AMST 100b Twentieth-Century American Culture
- Six electives

It is recommended that AMST 10a, a lecture/discussion course, and AMST 100a, a small seminar course, be taken early on in a student’s coursework, while AMST 100b, the capstone requirement, is typically taken during the senior year.

Electives are chosen mainly from the list of courses offered by the American studies faculty (a complete list of offerings can be found in the *Brandeis University Bulletin*), but you are also free to choose from a list of courses on matters American that are offered by other departments including politics, English, history, anthropology, sociology, art, music, and Judaic studies. If there is a course that is not on this list, but which you feel should be, you are invited to make that case to the department. How and what to choose, when planning your course of study, demands close advising, which is sedulously provided by the department.

Other Academic Features

Independent research, reading courses, internships, and studying abroad or elsewhere in the United States:

There is ample opportunity to do an individually designed research project one-on-one with a faculty member, or to pursue a program of specialized readings on topics not covered in regular courses (AMST 97a,b and AMST 98a,b). Many students also pursue off-campus internships under the supervision of a faculty member (AMST 92a,b). Additionally, in the American Studies

department, we stress the importance of studying America in comparison to other cultures, and therefore many of our students study abroad for a semester or full year (typically the junior year) in England, Scotland, France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Australia, and Israel. Each year we bring returning travelers together to share the lessons learned from studying America from a foreign perspective. Also available are excellent domestic programs at other universities such as the internship/study programs in American politics at American University in Washington, D.C.

Honors Thesis

Some students choose to write an honors thesis during their senior year, taking an additional full-year course, AMST 99d. There is an honors colloquium for all students pursuing honors, but most of the year's work is done with the thesis adviser. A topic is painstakingly developed and a lengthy thesis is produced and then defended before a committee. Over the years, several of our students' theses have later appeared as published books. It is challenging work, perhaps not for everyone; but, as our alumni frequently tell us, it is important and memorable.

Minors and Other Academic Programs

All students are invited to augment their major by completing one or more of the many minors or programs offered at Brandeis. However, four of these are situated within the American Studies department itself—legal studies, environmental studies, film studies, and journalism. Many of the courses in those areas double-count for American Studies and there are many points of intersection between the major and these programs. The internships in these programs are particularly rich, carefully selected, and closely supervised by our faculty.

Career Options

Typically, students who enroll anticipate careers in law, business, public policy, communications, education, journalism, or sports. Students also enter the major who are undecided about future careers and want the opportunity to reflect on their prospects and projects within the rich context the American studies major provides.

Faculty

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

- **Stephen Whitfield, chair**
Modern political and cultural history
- **Joyce Antler, undergraduate advising head**
Women's history, social history
- **Jacob Cohen**
American culture, politics, and thought
- **Shilpa Davé**
Race and ethnicity, Asian-American studies
- **Thomas Doherty**
Film and culture
- **Brian Donahue**
American environmental studies
- **Maura Farrelly, director, journalism program**
American religion
- **Henry Felt**
Documentary film
- **Richard Gaskins, director, legal studies; director, social justice and social policy**
Law, social policy, and philosophy
- **Laura Goldin**
Environmental studies
- **Daniel Terris**
Literature and intellectual history