Mission Statement

American Studies is an interdisciplinary field that critically examines the paradigmatic narratives that shape our received understandings of the American past and present. American Studies considers contexts such as settler colonialism, slavery, labor, capitalism, immigration, and war, all of which have deeply influenced the ideas, history, culture, and society of the United States. Students examine how political, economic, and social differences inform and are reproduced in crucial public areas such as the law, education, work, health and the environment. Students attend to the intersecting dynamics of race, class, religion, region, gender and sexuality, in the formation of American groups, communities, and institutions, and consider how these dynamics are mediated by "culture," broadly understood as literature, music, the visual arts, communications media, and popular and mass culture.

Established in 1980, the Tufts program offers a Bachelor of Arts degree in American Studies. The signature feature of the program is the interdisciplinary clusters, which provide students with the opportunity to design their own course of study, emphasizing the development of critical analysis, intellectual independence, and creative practice. With the help of their advisor, students draw upon the academic resources of a variety of disciplines – Anthropology, Art History, Drama, English, History, Music, Religion, and Sociology, as well as interdisciplinary fields such as Africana Studies, Asian American Studies, Latino Studies, Community Health, Education, International Studies, Peace and Justice Studies, Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, or Environmental Studies – to create a course of study in which they can pursue the particular projects that interest them. In their senior year, all American Studies seniors design a capstone special project or honors thesis related to their cluster, expressing the culmination of their studies. They are encouraged to engage with and contribute to the public sphere as interns, artists, activists and scholars.

American Studies Faculty

Faculty throughout the university participate in the American Studies program, and teach courses for the American Studies major. Those who are actively engaged in the American Studies Program are designated as either Core Faculty or Affiliates. Regardless of their status, all share a commitment to the AMER mission statement and to American Studies students.

Core faculty are full- or part- time faculty who regularly teach courses with an AMER prefix. Full-time core faculty advise majors as well as students doing special projects and theses related to American Studies. Part-time core faculty are adjunct faculty whose duties do not include advising majors, although they may elect to advise students’ projects or theses.

Affiliates teach courses in other departments or units and contribute to American Studies in one of several ways: their courses are routinely used by American Studies students to fulfill their
clusters; they regularly supervise AMER theses and projects; and/or they are actively engaged in AS meetings and other activities.

**Advising**

Because American Studies is an interdisciplinary field, many of the courses fulfilling the requirements for the major are selected from departments and other interdisciplinary programs across the university. This flexibility offers students the opportunity to explore a particular theme or topic from an interdisciplinary perspective, but it also means that they bear more responsibility for designing their major curriculum. Working with their advisor(s) is thus crucially important, particularly in the process of constructing an intellectually coherent program of study. The student’s advisor should be a core or affiliate faculty with expertise closely related to the cluster theme they intend to pursue. The Director can help students identify possible advisors, but it will be their responsibility to meet with him or her to ask if s/he will agree to advise them. The student’s advisor will help them identify possible topics for their Senior Special Project or Honors Thesis; s/he may also agree to serve as advisor to the student’s SSP or HT, but this is not required.

**Declaring a Major in American Studies**

As in other departments and programs, students declare their majors in the spring semester of their sophomore year. Once the student has decided on American Studies, (and if s/he he does not already have an advisor for American Studies) make an appointment with the Director, or with a member of the core faculty who can serve as a temporary advisor until a cluster has been selected. Ultimately, students will want to select an advisor with expertise in their area of focus. Before meeting with the American Studies advisor for the first time, fill in an American Studies Planning Worksheet (available online), which will indicate the current status of the foundation and distribution requirements as well as any courses the student may have taken that fulfill the American Studies major.

Many AMER students are double majors, often with other interdisciplinary majors: See the Tufts Bulletin under “School of Arts and Sciences, Department or Program Major” regarding double counting. This is particularly important for those doing interdisciplinary or disciplinary minors along with their American Studies major, because the rules for double counting among the two types of minors are different.
Undergraduate Major Requirements

To graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree in American Studies, a student must complete ten credits: One Foundation course AMER10-20 (one credit); one Integrative Seminar AMER 181-190 (one credit); one History course with at least two-thirds of course content focused (on some aspect of the U.S. (one credit); five credits that form a coherent interdisciplinary cluster (see clusters below). The last two credits are fulfilled by AMER 198, Senior Special Project, taken in either the fall or spring semester of the senior year for one credit, plus one elective credit (course content to coordinate with course work of interdisciplinary cluster); OR AMER 199, Senior Honors Thesis, taken in both semesters of the senior year for two credits. The Senior Special Project or Honors Thesis must integrate course work of interdisciplinary cluster. A grade of C- or better is required for a course to count toward the major. Note: AP courses may not count towards the American Studies major.

A minimum of three of the courses you take to fulfill your major requirements will have AMER prefixes, and will be taught by Core American Studies faculty—the Foundation course, an Integrative Seminar and the Senior thesis/project seminar—although students may well take additional courses with AMER prefixes that will count towards their cluster or as an elective.

AMER Foundation courses are numbered 10-20; Integrative Seminars are numbered in the 180s, and the SSP/HT seminar is numbered 198 or 199 respectively. Additionally, a Featured Topics in American Studies series (AMER 40-70/140-180) include cross-listed courses, as well as courses taught by American Studies faculty that are neither Foundation courses nor Integrative Seminars. Featured Topics courses that receive a three-digit number must require students to do a substantial research paper. Special Topics (AMER 194+section number) are new courses taught by visiting faculty or those courses not yet been approved by the curriculum committee.

The majority of the courses taken to complete the major will be from other departments, whose numbering systems vary. At least two of the courses taken to complete the cluster must be at an intermediate or advanced level (in most, but not all cases, at the 100 level); in other words, a cluster may not be composed of five introductory-level classes. Be aware that some of the more advanced courses relevant to a cluster may have departmental pre-requisites. On occasion, American Studies majors have been granted admission to such courses if they can demonstrate an appropriate degree of preparation via other courses as well as a solid intellectual reason for wanting to take the course. Please consult an advisor before petitioning for admission to such courses.

The majority of AMER courses count towards the Social Science distribution, although some count towards the Humanities or Arts distribution. Consult the online Bulletin at studentservices.tufts.edu (click on Registrar) for up-to-date information about courses that fulfill distribution requirements.
American Studies Coursework

The Foundation Course (AMER 10-20)

Even before declaring a major in American Studies, we strongly recommend taking one of the AMER Foundation courses, e.g. Race in America (AMER 12), American Identities (AMER 16), or a foundational course with an AMER number 10-20. Foundation courses are introductory surveys that examine America’s promises of equality and inclusion and the contradictory systems of power, difference and inequality in the United States. They also introduce interdisciplinary concepts and methodology of American Studies, and familiarize students with the program goals of American Studies at Tufts. They are open to first-years and sophomores. While not all students will go on to declare a major in American Studies, these courses are intended to serve as gateway courses to the major. Students who wish to take more than one Foundation course can count it towards their cluster if it is relevant to their topic, but it cannot count as an Integrative Seminar.

If a student has not taken a Foundation course prior to declaring the major, s/he should take it as soon as possible, as American Studies majors must take their foundation course by the end of their 5th semester (i.e., before the second semester of their junior year). Students intending to go abroad their junior year must be aware of this requirement and plan ahead accordingly.

Students must have completed their Foundation requirement before enrolling in AMER 199 (Honors Thesis). Students wishing to write an Honors Thesis who have not been able to complete their Foundation requirement before the end of their junior year because of extenuating circumstances (e.g. studying abroad or coming late to the major) should meet with their advisor and/or the Director to petition for an exemption to this policy.

Integrative Seminars (AMER180-190)

Designed primarily for majors (but open to adequately prepared non-majors), Integrative Seminars have a defined thematic focus, and are small enough to allow for intensive discussions and collaborative learning. These seminars provide experience with research methods and require the writing of a research paper. Learning the fundamentals of research and writing – writing an annotated bibliography and literature review, understanding the stakes of different methodologies, and gaining experience constructing an interdisciplinary scholarly apparatus – will serve students well before they begin their senior capstone projects. Students may take more than one Integrative Seminar, but they cannot double count their required Integrative Seminar for their cluster as well.
History Requirement

Majors must complete one History course in which at least two thirds of the content covers the United States, or alternatively, that focuses on the relationship between the United States and other parts of the globe. History courses offered by the Experimental College may count towards a cluster, but may not fulfill this History requirement. Transfer students may petition to have relevant courses from history departments at other colleges or universities count towards this requirement, but AP courses will not satisfy this requirement. Students who take a US History class while studying abroad must receive approval from the History Department at Tufts before requesting credit towards the American Studies history requirement.

Clusters

An interdisciplinary cluster of five credits is chosen by the student to prepare for advanced work in the SSP/HT. The cluster is also an opportunity for students to take courses with instructors who might become SSP/HT mentors. The director and other faculty advisors work closely with students in tailoring individual programs reflecting particular interests and providing a framework for the continued integration of knowledge at more advanced levels.

The American Studies website includes lists of approved courses for each cluster, which students and their advisors will consult as they design their program of study. However, these lists are not exhaustive, and if a student or his/her advisor believes a course is relevant to the program goals, but is not on the list, the student may request permission from the Director to add it to the cluster. At least two of the courses counting towards the cluster must be at an intermediate or advanced level. One (but no more) independent reading OR internship course can count towards the cluster.

If students have particular interests that are not addressed in the list of existing clusters, they may decide to design their own cluster in consultation with a relevant advisor. This cluster must structurally resemble the existing clusters, i.e. they must combine at least two or three courses focusing specifically on the selected theme; the remaining courses must be related to this theme but not required to be 100% focused on it. The Director of American Studies must approve independently designed clusters. Independently designed clusters must be declared and approved by the second semester of the junior year.
Current Clusters Listing

The cluster themes are:

- Comparative Race and Ethnicity
- Health, Environment and Society
- Institutions and Power in the US
- Representation and Performance in the Arts and Humanities
- Issues in US Education
- Community Based Studies
- individually designed cluster (please consult advisor)

The Capstone Project

All American Studies majors must complete a capstone project that integrates or expands upon some aspect of the theme of their interdisciplinary cluster. The required American Studies Senior Seminars, AMER 198 and AMER 199, are designed to help students master the intellectual and methodological components of their capstone projects and, at the same time, to build a collegial and supportive community of independent scholars. The final grade for AMER 198 and AMER 199 will be determined by the student’s committee. At least one of a student's HT/SSP readers must be an American Studies faculty affiliate. In exceptional cases, a student may petition the Director for a waiver to this policy. The AMER 198 and AMER 199 Instructor, however, will provide committee members with written evaluations of the student’s performance in the seminar (e.g. attendance, participation, and completion of assignments), which will be taken into consideration in determining the grade for the course. HT students’ progress will be assessed in early December by their primary reader, the AMER 198/199 instructor, and AMER Program Steering Committee. Failure to complete AMER 198/199 assignments and make adequate progress on research and preliminary writing will result in an HT becoming an SSP.

Senior Special Project (AMER 198)

A semester-long senior seminar for one credit which will result in a capstone project or paper integrating the student's interdisciplinary cluster. If written as a research paper, it will be a minimum of 35 pages, although other media are acceptable for part of the 35 pages, e.g., a film, play, artwork, photography, musical production.
Senior Honors Thesis (AMER 0199)

The Honors Thesis covers two semesters and earns 2 credits. Students wishing to do an Honors Thesis rather than a Senior Special Project must submit a tentative proposal for their Honors Thesis to the American Studies Program by the end of their junior year. In addition to registering for AMER 0199, students must complete the Thesis Honors Candidate Form and submit it to Dowling Hall by mid-November of their senior year. University rules state that students must have been on the Dean's List at least twice in order to undertake an Honors Thesis (See the Bulletin of Tufts University.); A student must have been on the Dean's List twice (campus policy) and have a 3.4 GPA (AMER policy) at the time of registering to qualify to write an honors thesis. Students who do not have a 3.4 when registering may, with the support of his/her advisor, petition the American Studies Steering Committee for permission to write a thesis.

The University requires only two committee members for an Honors Thesis, although interdisciplinary research may benefit from an optional third member. At least one of a student's HT/SSP readers must be an American Studies faculty affiliate. In exceptional cases, a student may petition the director for a waiver to this policy. The subject and scope of the Honors Thesis, agreed upon in advance by the student and his/her advisors, are substantially greater than those of the SSP. For example, if the Honors Thesis is in the form of a research paper, the length of the thesis is a minimum of 75 pages, instead of 35 pages for the SSP. The defense of the Senior Honors Thesis must take place before the final exams begin in May. The defense may take place shortly before or during the Reading period. It is the duty of the graduating senior to submit his or her completed Senior Honors Thesis manuscript to Digital Collections and Archives in Tisch Library and the American Studies office before May Commencement. Theses may be submitted electronically or in traditional bound form and should adhere to Tisch Library archival submission guidelines posted at http://dca.tufts.edu/ua/policies/senior.html.

At the recommendation of the student's thesis committee, the senior thesis may merit honors — Honors in Senior Thesis; High Honors in Senior Thesis; or Highest Honors in Senior Thesis — which will be read aloud at Commencement. These honors are distinct from the Latin honors based on overall academic performance (cum laude, magna cum laude, and summa cum laude).

IMPORTANT: The AMER faculty will only consider recommending students who have completed Honors Theses for graduation with summa cum laude honors. This recommendation is not automatic, however, even if a student meets the GPA requirements and has written a thesis. The faculty will also consider the quality of the students' work and their contribution in the classroom and to American Studies. Earned Latin and/or thesis honors appear on the student's transcript.

Students must have completed their Foundation requirement before enrolling in AMER 199 (Honors Thesis). Students wishing to write an Honors Thesis who have not been able to complete their Foundation requirement before the end of their junior year because of extenuating
circumstances (e.g. studying abroad or coming late to the major) should meet with their advisor and/or the Director to petition for an exemption to this policy.

**Independent Study**

Students wishing to do an independent study project related to their cluster topic before initiating their SSP/HT must find an advisor and sign up for AMER 193. No more than one Independent Study course can count towards the cluster. AMER 193 is limited to American Studies majors only and will require department permission prior to registration.

**Internships**

The American Studies Program at Tufts encourages its students to learn from and become engaged in their community, including the Greater Boston metropolitan area where they are residents while they are at Tufts. AMER internships, available only to AMER majors, are a valuable way of achieving these goals. AMER students should register for AMER 0099; if they choose to use it towards a cluster, they must receive a letter grade, not pass/fail. A minimum of 150 hours of work for the semester is required.

The student is responsible for finding the organization willing to accept an internship including an on-site professional-level supervisor. The student also has to find a faculty member to supervise the internship. The student must prepare a concise proposal explaining the nature of their internship as well as their goals and motives. The proposal must be approved by the Director of American Studies prior to registration and must be completed no later than the add/drop deadline for the semester. If the internship is taken for a letter grade, there is a requirement of a 10-page paper to be submitted to the faculty advisor who will grade it. A student may choose to register for the internship pass/fail. Students must be aware that there can only be two notations of an internship on a student’s transcript, and one counted in any given cluster.

**Study Abroad**

We encourage AMER majors to study abroad because international travel offers rich opportunities for reflecting upon US society and culture from different vantage points; for example, how the US has influenced other parts of the world, or how the US is perceived by the citizens of other countries. Nevertheless, students majoring in American Studies must work carefully with their advisors prior to going abroad in order to ensure that they can complete their major requirements if courses they take abroad do not transfer into American Studies. It is
important to note, however, that no more than three courses taken abroad can count towards the American Studies major. In addition, foundation courses, integrative seminars and Honors Thesis/Senior Special projects must be completed on campus.

Transfer Courses
Transfer courses may count towards the cluster, elective and history requirement, but not towards the Foundation course or Integrative Seminar. No more than three transfer courses may count towards the major.

Department Transfer of Credit Representative: Professor Adriana Zavala

Experimental College
Unless listed on the American Studies list of Recommended Courses, Ex College courses may count, only by petition of the Director, towards a cluster, elective or history requirement.