



AMERICAN STUDIES GRADUATE PROGRAM GUIDE

American Studies Graduate Program Vision

The American Studies program strives to provide world-class graduate training at the M.A. and Ph.D. levels in American Studies for students interested in the interdisciplinary study of American culture. At universities in many nations around the world, American Studies is the rubric of choice for students seeking a broad understanding of American culture. American Studies examines those values and institutional structures that hold Americans together and, at times, divide them into the kinds of factions that the authors of the Federalist Papers so feared when they argued for the ratification of the US Constitution. How America is constituted really is the core subject of American Studies.

With a special focus on the American West, and with major fields in American Arts, American History, American Literature, American Pluralism, and Public History, the program draws on a distinguished cohort of full-time and associated faculty with research and teaching expertise in the disciplines of Anthropology, Architectural History, Art History, English, History, Media and Theater Arts, Native American Studies, Political Science, and Sociology.

The program prepares students for careers in academic research and teaching, business, journalism, cultural resource management, museums, or government service, especially in the U.S. Department of State (primarily its information and cultural services), the Foreign Service and agencies like the National Park Service. American Studies has long been one of the primary training grounds for American foreign service officers as well as journalists and business leaders who are charged with making sense of the American cultural mosaic for international audiences. Additionally, the program will position graduate students to think and work in a globalized political economy, preparing them for multiple career options where depth and breadth of knowledge about American culture is essential.

Introduction to the Guide

This handbook provides basic information about the MA and PhD programs, their requirements, expectations, and procedures. Students should familiarize themselves with the information here and keep this guide for future reference. Keep in mind, however, that questions or concerns may arise that are not covered here; students should always speak with the program coordinator or the director of the program if they encounter a situation not addressed herein.

In addition, there are a number of rules, regulations, and deadlines that are set by the Graduate School. It is the responsibility of the graduate student to maintain compliance with these rules and regulations. For the latest deadlines, forms, and policy updates, please refer to the Graduate School's website: www.montana.edu/gradschool/. Again, it is the responsibility of the graduate student to stay informed of the Graduate School's policies and deadlines.

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Course Descriptions

- **AMST 501: Methods in American Studies (3 credit, offered Spring semester)**
Introduction to major trends in American Studies scholarship, with a particular focus on American Studies in an international context. The course will also introduce students to the range of scholarship in the American Studies program.
- **AMST 502: Research and Writing in American Studies (3 credits, offered Summer semester)**
Graduate research and advanced readings in American Studies.
- **AMST 590: MA Thesis**
10 credits required for MA students pursuing plan A. PREREQUISITE: Approved program of study.
- **AMST 592: Independent Study**
Directed research and study on an individual basis. No more than 6 credits of 592 are allowed by the Graduate School for doctoral and MA professional paper-option students; no more than 4 credits are allowed by the Graduate School for MA thesis-option students. Register for 592 with the American Studies program coordinator. If you are taking a 592 in another department, please work with that department's program coordinator to register.
- **AMST 594: Seminar (1 credit, offered Fall semester)**
Graduate level topics which are not covered in other courses. Students will prepare and present discussion material.
- **AMST 690: Doctoral Thesis**
18 credits required for Doctoral students. PREREQUISITE: Approved program of study.

MA Program Requirements

Advising

MA students will work primarily with their committee chair for advising. Before the committee chair has been selected, MA students will be advised by the program director. Please contact the program coordinator to make an appointment to meet with the program director.

Coursework

The MA degree requires a total of 30 credit hours. All students must take AMST 501 (3 credits – offered spring semester) and AMST 502 (3 credits – offered summer semester). It is recommended (not required) that all students take AMST 594 (1 credit – fall semester) in order to meet and interact with faculty from across the campus. These courses have been created to serve as the core of each graduate student's program. Students may also take up to nine credits of 400-level courses, and up to six credits of independent study (592) coursework. Internships at museums and historical societies may also count for credit.

Plan A – Thesis Option

Students in Plan A have opted to write an MA thesis. The student will work closely with his/her committee chair to develop the thesis. Other committee members should be consulted as well. Ten credits of AMST 590 are required to complete this option; these ten credits can be used to fulfill the 30 credit requirement. Students in Plan A will also sit for comprehensive written and oral exams.

Plan B – Coursework Option

Students in Plan B will complete the general coursework listed above and sit for comprehensive written and oral exams.

Committees

Per Graduate School regulations, MA committees must be comprised of three to five faculty members. The chair must a PhD, tenure track (or tenured) professor at Montana State University.

In selecting a committee chair, MA students will want to take into account some of the following: a faculty member's intellectual interests and expertise; the relevance of a faculty member's expertise to the student's interests or MA thesis; courses taken with a faculty member; faculty member availability; working relationship with the faculty member. The program recommends that a student have a committee chair by the second semester in the MA program. The program director can assist MA students in identifying an appropriate chair. Students are encouraged to perform independent research on potential chairs as well. Existing commitments – from other graduate advisees to research trips and sabbaticals – may preclude some faculty members from agreeing to serve on a committee or as chair. Additional committee members are selected in coordination with the chair.

The chair of the MA committee has two primary responsibilities: 1) to guide the student through his/her coursework and comprehensive exams (and thesis research and writing if applicable); and 2) to preside over the student's written and oral exams (and thesis defense if applicable).

MA students work primarily with their chair to develop clear expectations, processes, and deadlines for the exams and thesis (if applicable). However, the student should also work to keep his/her full committee informed.

The second and third members of a MA committee primarily serve as readers of the exams and thesis (if applicable). However, second and third committee members may take on a much more active role. They are strongly encouraged to provide written comments on draft theses.

It is recommended that students arrange a meeting with their entire committee at least once per semester.

“Program of Study” form

Once the committee chair and committee members are set, the graduate student will need to submit a “Program of Study” form to the Graduate School. This form is available on the Graduate School’s website. This form requires the original signatures of all committee members as well as a listing of the coursework that the committee has approved for the graduate student’s degree.

Exams

Written Comprehensive Exam

MA students will take one written exam that consists of at least two questions. A total of four hours will be allotted for the exams. Students are allowed to take the exam in one sitting; they can also break the exam into two parts and write on one question per day, over two consecutive days. The first question is issued by the student’s committee chair. The second question will be issued by the remaining members of the committee. Students must be registered for three credits the semester that they would like to take their exams.

Students develop a reading list in conjunction with their committees and are also encouraged to ask their committees if there are particular themes, issues, or topics on which they would like the student to focus. The final reading list is determined by the committee chair.

Some faculty members write one broad, synthetic question. Others give several, shorter questions. Some may give students a choice of several questions. Again, it is up to the committee and the student to clarify these issues.

Once the student has completed the questions, all committee members will be given a PDF of the questions and the exam responses. The committee will grade the written portion of the exam pass/fail by a majority vote. A student may not take the oral exam unless he/she has passed the written exam.

Oral Comprehensive Exam (and Thesis Defense if applicable)

The oral exam should be scheduled no more than ten days after the written exam. The oral exam is scheduled for a single two hour block and will focus on coursework, the written exam, and the thesis (if applicable). For Plan A students, the first hour will focus on coursework and the written exam, and the second hour will be a defense of the thesis. For Plan B students, the oral exam will cover coursework and the written exam.

The oral exam will start by following up on the written exam. Any committee member may pose additional questions about the written exam.

Scheduling Exams

It is the student’s responsibility to schedule both his/her written and oral exams. The student will need to work with his/her committee to find times and dates that will work for everyone. The student should

contact the program coordinator to schedule a conference room for the oral exam. The student will need to secure a location for the written exam.

The Graduate School has very specific guidelines for when exams and theses need to be completed. Students must be very familiar with these regulations. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that his/her exams and thesis are completed by the appropriate deadlines.

Grading the Comprehensive Exams

The comprehensive examination is graded pass/fail by a majority committee vote. The student officially passes the examination when all concerns and deficiencies have been met and are deemed satisfactory by *all* committee members.

Requirements

- Successful completion of all coursework
- Thesis (if Plan A)
- Written and oral examinations (Plan A and B)

Doctoral Program Requirements

Advising

Doctoral students are required to enter the American Studies program with a committed first-year advisor. This process is now part of the application process. The first-year advisor is responsible for advising the student until a committee chair has been chosen. Often, the first-year advisor will transition into the official role of committee chair. If not, the first-year advisor and program director will be instrumental in assisting the doctoral student in selecting and approaching potential committee chairs.

Coursework

The PhD in American Studies requires 60 credit hours, including a minimum of 18 credits of AMST 690 Doctoral Thesis (please note, students are not eligible to register for AMST 690 Doctoral Thesis until they have passed their foreign language exam as well as their written and oral exams). Students are required to take AMST 501 (3 credits – offered spring semester) and AMST 502 (3 credits – offered summer semester). It is recommended (not required) that all students take AMST 592 (1 credit – fall semester) in order to meet and interact with faculty from across the campus. These courses have been created to serve as the core of each graduate student's program and will be counted toward the 60 credit requirement. Students may also take up to nine credits of 400-level courses, and up to nine credits of independent study (592) coursework. Internships at museums and historical societies may also count for credit.

Note that the precise credit and course requirements will be determined by the committee chair in consultation with the student and the other committee members. Up to 30 credits from a previously earned graduate degree may be counted toward the 60 credit hour requirement. The committee chair will determine how many credits may be used.

All students must declare a major field and at least one supporting area. The major field must be selected from the following list: 1) American Arts; 2) American History; 3) American Literature; 4) American Pluralism; 5) Public History. The supporting field should be thematic. Options will vary and will be determined by the student and his/her committee. Examples include Native American Studies, Technology and Culture, Women's Studies. Exceptions and/or changes to the supporting field may be made in consultation with the student's committee chair.

Committees

Per Graduate School regulations, Doctoral committees must be comprised of at least four members. The chair must have a PhD and be tenure track (or tenured) professor at Montana State University. The committee must have a majority of tenure track (or tenured) faculty members from MSU. Committee members not holding faculty status at MSU must submit documentation of their qualifications, including a vita. Non-MSU individuals may not hold positions as committee chairs.

In selecting a committee chair, Doctoral students will want to take into account some of the following: a faculty member's intellectual interests and expertise; the relevance of a faculty member's expertise to the student's dissertation and interests; courses taken with a faculty member; faculty member availability; working relationship with the faculty member. The program recommends that the student have a committee chair by the third semester in the program. Existing commitments – from other graduate advisees to research trips and sabbaticals – may preclude some faculty members from agreeing to serve

on a committee or as chair. Additional committee members are then selected after discussion between the student and his/her committee chair.

The chair of the Doctoral committee has two primary responsibilities: 1) to guide the student through his/her dissertation research and writing; and 2) to preside over the student's written and oral exams and dissertation defense.

Doctoral students work primarily with their chair to develop clear expectations, processes, and deadlines for the dissertation and exams. However, the student should also work to keep his/her full committee informed.

The remaining members of a Doctoral committee primarily serve as readers of the dissertation and exams. However, they may take on a much more active role. They are strongly encouraged to provide written comments on draft dissertations.

It is recommended that the student arrange a meeting with their entire committee at least once per semester.

“Program of Study” form

Once the committee chair and committee members are set, the graduate student will need to submit a “Program of Study” form to the Graduate School. This form is available on the Graduate School's website. This form requires the original signatures of all committee members as well as a listing of the coursework that the committee has approved for the graduate student's degree.

Exams

Four examinations are required of doctoral students: foreign language exam, written exams, oral exam, and the dissertation defense. The foreign language exam, the written exams, and the oral exam must be completed before students are eligible to enroll in AMST 690.

Foreign Language Exam

All Doctoral students are required to demonstrate reading knowledge of at least one foreign language, as determined by an examination administered in coordination with the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures. Students will work with the program coordinator and/or director to identify a faculty member in the Department of Languages and Literatures who will administer the exam. Students will be expected to translate one scholarly work from a foreign language into English. The foreign language exam requirement must be met before a student can sit for written and oral exams.

Written Exams

Students will take one two-hour written exam on the field of American Studies. The American Studies Advisory Committee will provide students with a reading list for the exam and will issue the exam questions. The Advisory Committee will grade the exam on a pass/fail basis.

In addition, students will complete one, four hour written exam on their major field and one, two hour written exam on their supporting field. The chair of the student's committee will issue the question(s) for the major field exam; the chair may solicit questions for the major field exam from other committee members as well. The chair generally solicits the minor field questions from the committee, but he/she may also contribute a question to the supporting area exam.

Students develop a reading list in conjunction with their committees and are also encouraged to ask their committees if there are particular themes, issues, or topics on which they would like the student to focus. The final reading list is determined by the committee chair.

Some faculty members write one broad, synthetic question. Others give several, shorter questions. Some may give students a choice of several questions. Again, it is up to the committee and the student to clarify these issues.

Once the student has completed the written exams, all committee members will be given a PDF of the questions and the exam responses. The committee will grade the written portion of the exam pass/fail by a majority vote. A student may not take the oral exam unless he/she has passed the written exams.

Oral Comprehensive Exam

The student should schedule the oral exam no more than ten days after the written exams. The oral exam is scheduled for a two hour block and will focus on coursework, the major and minor written exams, and a defense of the student's dissertation prospectus. Please note that it is the student's responsibility to ensure that his/her committee has the dissertation prospectus well in advance of the oral exam. The student will need to work with the committee to see what the members will require.

The first hour of the oral exam will be a follow up on the written exams. Any committee member may pose additional questions about the written exams. The second hour of the exam will be a defense of the student's dissertation prospectus.

Once the student has passed the foreign language, written, and oral examinations, he/she can begin enrolling in AMST 690 Doctoral Thesis.

Dissertation Defense

Students will need to be enrolled in three credits the semester they defend. The defense will be two hours in length. The first hour will be a public presentation, and the second hour will be open to just the student and his/her committee members. The student will need to have all appropriate forms signed by the committee members at the time of the exam. The committee may recommend rewrites and edits to the dissertation. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that he/she will have enough time to complete any rewrites before the Graduate School's published deadline. Furthermore, the Graduate School has very specific requirements concerning formatting. The student will need to contact the Graduate School's formatting advisor to be sure that he/she is following the requirements.

Scheduling Exams

It is the student's responsibility to schedule both his/her written and oral exams and dissertation defense. The student will need to work with his/her committee to find times and dates that will work for everyone. The student should contact the program coordinator to schedule a conference room for the oral exam and the dissertation defense. The student will need to secure a location for the written exams.

The Graduate School has very specific guidelines for when exams and theses need to be completed. Please be very familiar with these regulations. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that his/her exams and dissertation defense are completed by the appropriate deadlines.

Grading the Comprehensive Exams

The comprehensive examination (written, oral and/or thesis defense) are graded pass/fail by a majority committee vote. The student officially passes the examination when all concerns and deficiencies have been met and are deemed satisfactory by *all* committee members. Please note that the American Studies field exam is graded pass/fail by the American Studies Advisory Committee.

Professional Development Project

In order to help prepare doctoral students for potential future careers, the American Studies program has built in a professional development project. The project will vary from student to student and should relate to how the student's research will be utilized in future employment settings. All projects will be presented and/or defended in front of the student's committee or committee chair, depending on the committee's preference.

For example, students who are interested in pursuing a career in teaching might develop a sample syllabus based on the student's major field. The student would then defend the syllabus to his/her committee or committee chair. Students interested in pursuing a career in museum studies might present and defend a design of a museum exhibit.

Requirements

All Doctoral students will successfully complete the following:

- All required coursework
- Foreign Language Exam
- Written and Oral Comprehensive Exams
- Dissertation prospectus
- Dissertation
- Defense of Dissertation
- Professional Development Project

Graduate Assistantships (available to both MA and PhD students)

The American Studies program has funding for one Graduate Teaching Assistantship and one Graduate Research Assistantship. The GTA will lead the recitation sections for AMST 101D Introduction to American Studies. The GTA will be evaluated by the instructor of AMST 101D. The GRA will be assigned to a faculty member to perform up to ten hours of research per week for that faculty member.

PhD GTAs will receive a stipend of \$8,000 per semester plus a 6 credit tuition waiver. MA GTAs will receive a stipend of \$5,000 per semester plus a 6 credit tuition waiver. GRAs are not eligible to receive a stipend, but they will receive a 6 credit tuition waiver.

The program coordinator will issue a call for GTA and GRA applications each semester to all students in the American Studies program. Both positions are competitive. Applications will be reviewed by the American Studies Advisory Committee.