

Programme Specification

MA American Studies

<i>School:</i>	Humanities
<i>Subject area:</i>	History, American and War Studies
<i>Entry from academic year:</i>	2020-21
<i>in the month(s) of:</i>	September
<i>Awarding institution:</i>	York St John University
<i>Teaching institution:</i>	York St John University
<i>Delivery location:</i>	York St John University
<i>Programme/s accredited by:</i>	Not applicable
<i>Exit awards:</i>	Postgraduate Certificate American Studies Postgraduate Diploma American Studies
<i>UCAS code / GTTR / other:</i>	Not applicable
<i>Joint Honours combinations:</i>	Not applicable
<i>QAA subject benchmark statement(s):</i>	Not applicable
<i>Mode/s of study:</i>	Postgraduate periods of study¹ for full-time
<i>Language of study:</i>	English
<i>Paired with foundation year</i>	No
<i>Study abroad opportunities:</i>	No
<i>Placement year opportunity:</i>	No

Introduction and special features

The American Studies Master's Degree at York St. John University offers a tightly integrated programme with a selection of modules that will enrich your research methods and approaches in the American Studies subject-area. Whilst concentrating on the core aspects of American Studies, this programme encourages you to pursue your research through avenues of related subjects (History, Literature and Film) forming a holistic, yet inter-disciplinary, approach. The modules offered within the programme's structure emphasise a cross-fertilisation of subject areas, promoting an international perspective towards America, such as global concerns and transnational considerations, thus shifting from the original constructs of America, 'American uniqueness' and 'exceptionalism' (Brian Edwards, *Globalising American Studies*, 2010). This programme is, therefore, well-suited to those students who prefer diversity to the narrower focus of a single-subject Master's degree. American Studies embraces those themes, inter-connections and methodologies shared across the School, which, when welded together constructively, will result in you gaining valuable, distinctive skills and experiences.

The USA, with its dynamic and varied culture, presents a vitally relevant, popular and challenging field for academic study, reflected in its legacy at York St. John University and as a longstanding traditional field of study in the UK. The importance of American Studies within the UK is underlined by the existence of specific professional bodies—the *British Association for American Studies*, the *British Association of Nineteenth Century Historians* and the *Transatlantic Studies Association*—which actively promote the subject in the widest context, and enjoys the support of the US embassy, which values the cultural benefits of the 'special relationship' between Britain and America.

¹ The standard period of study will apply unless otherwise stated

The programme is designed to develop your knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding and underpinning the concept of American Studies as it has developed over the years. A core module will have a particular emphasis on the historical, theoretical, cultural contextualisation and interrogation of American Studies across a wide range of disciplines. The programme then offers you a sophisticated suite of modules, which will encourage you to reflect critically upon the approach of American Studies. Practitioners of American Studies have consistently advocated the need to break through outmoded disciplinary boundaries in an effort to establish more open approaches and connections, thus encouraging the exploration, and within individual modules, of a wider range of cultural 'texts' and artefacts (art, film, music, photography as well as the more established sources from literature and history). This will allow for greater multiple meanings, narratives and contexts within a study of the United States as a place as well as an idea.

This suite of taught modules has been carefully constructed to take you on a series of exciting journeys, from a discussion of American Studies as an approach, including the immediate localities, cities, regions and borders of the United States, to the wider national, transnational and international settings, offering a multi-perspectival interpretation of the United States. You will engage in an inter-connected sequence of dynamic debates, inviting you to a greater understanding of the complexity of the United States as a cultural construct as well as a geographical and political entity. The taught programme as a whole will offer you a rigorous preparation for the final supervised independent study module culminating in a dissertation.

Primary materials are the basis of professional research, so you will be encouraged to develop your skills in utilising cultural and literary sources of all types and they must be subject to critical analysis. However, the objective of research is to extend the body of knowledge so it will also be necessary for you to develop an extensive engagement with secondary sources. Historical and cultural articles and books are the principle forms by which professional researchers develop their thinking.

Special features

- Teaching team of active researchers in the area of American Studies.
- Opportunities to contribute papers to various forums, including an integrated MA American Studies seminar series.
- A range of exciting, contemporary and theoretically-driven modules offered to shape the course of your MA according to your academic interests.
- Invaluable professional experience from the range of assessments (portfolios, essays, conference paper presentations).
- Opportunities to engage with the programme such as organised field trips, visiting speakers, and attendance at conferences held at York St John.
- You will be encouraged and guided by staff to publish your research work.
- As a postgraduate student, you will be part of the academic community at York St John.
- The programme curriculum emphasises local, regional, transnational and global perspectives.
- You will have an opportunity to participate in YSJU and Departmental events such as the annual Create festival and other commemorative engagements (talks that focus on Black History Month and LGBT History Month) Opportunity to apply to undertake archival research or attend a conference funded by Judy Giles Scholarship.
- There are a number of professional development projects currently running in Humanities such as 'Students as Researchers fund' the opportunity for postgraduates to apply to work with staff to organise an MA Symposium each year.

Admissions criteria

You must meet the University's general entry criteria for [postgraduate](#) study. In addition, you must have:

- Applicants will normally require a first degree at Upper-Second Class Honours level, however, applications will be considered from interested parties who do not possess these qualifications.

If your first language is not English, you need to take an IELTS test or an equivalent qualification accepted by the University (see <https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/international/how-to-apply/english-language-requirements/>).

If you do not have traditional qualifications, you may be eligible for entry on the basis of [Accredited Prior \(Experiential\) Learning \(APL/APEL\)](#). We also consider applications for entry with advanced standing.

Decisions on individual applicants will be made by the Head of Programme in consultation with subject specialists, the Admissions Officer and Head of International Office, as appropriate.

Programme aim(s)

The aims of the programme are as follows:

1. To provide students with the opportunity to undertake an interdisciplinary and thematic approach to American Studies.
2. To enable students to develop a greater understanding of American Studies and its cultural debates.
3. To enhance students' academic and professional skills through further postgraduate study.
4. To provide a supportive learning environment which meets the needs of a diverse set of learners.
5. To promote and contribute to a vibrant postgraduate community in the University.
6. To make a significant contribution to the development of a strong research culture within the University.

Programme learning outcomes

Level 7

Upon successful completion of a Master of Arts in American Studies students will be able to demonstrate:

- 7.1 An in-depth specialist knowledge and mastery of methods and approaches relating to American Studies.
- 7.2 A sophisticated understanding of the nature of American Studies as an approach.
- 7.3 A comprehensive understanding of a series of issues, theories and contexts within the field of American Studies.
- 7.4 Critical engagement with an extensive range of cultural and primary sources relevant to American Studies.
- 7.5 The ability to undertake advanced critical analysis rooted in American Studies and sourced from local, regional and global perspectives.
- 7.6 A comprehensive understanding of research methodologies in undertaking and successfully executing an extended piece of independent research and critical writing.

Programme structure

Code	Level	Term	Title	Credits	Module status	
					compulsory or optional to take C or O	non-compensatable or compensatable NC or X
AMS7001M	7	1	Critical Approaches to American Studies	30	C	NC
AMS7002M	7	1	Cityscapes	30	C	X
AMS7004M	7	2	Alternative Americas	30	C	X
AMS7005M	7	3	Research Dissertation	60	C	NC if taken
AMS7003M	7	2	Transnational Border Crossings	30	C	X

To start, there is one core module which introduces the central methodologies and concepts of the programme. Commencing in the first term, *Critical Approaches to American Studies* is designed to introduce you to a range of perspectives on both past and contemporary methodological approaches and theoretical viewpoints. You are encouraged to reflect upon scholarly methods and research management skills during this module. Therefore, this module will also house the research skills element, at the end of which there will be a presentation on your dissertation literature/methodology review.

Also in trimester 1 is *Negotiated Territories: Cityscapes*, which examines the concepts of competing discourses and subjugated narratives in American Studies. The module considers the historical and cultural significance of the American city. The trend in urban histories continues the long tradition of considering the American city as a metonymic space for larger considerations of nation and citizenship in historiography, art, film, and both fictional and non-fictional writing. The module will examine this theoretical position, and will focus on one or two American cities as case studies each year.

In term 2, you take *Transnational Border Crossings*. *Transnational Border Crossings* explores competing discourses in America but in terms of regionalism and borders. This module takes account of the dialogues and the multiple and subjugated narratives formed at the margins, of migrations and passages, of different relations and the tensions and re-connections that emerge, as revealed in history, literature and culture. Utilising the past, literature and film, and within the interpretive framework of these modules, the interactive tensions and relationships of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality will also be analysed. The module will question whether it is any longer possible or indeed desirable to view America within its traditional political and geographic borders by exploring the cultural, historical and symbolic significance of a range of American spaces.

The final core module of the suite is *Alternative Americas* in trimester 2. This module examines multiple and diverse identities that make up 'America'. Through a range of historical and contemporary sources, and using a variety of approaches, underpinned by theoretical considerations, the module will explore both internal and external constructions of American identity post-1945. Students will study a range of primary texts that may include films, novels, music, and visual art materials. Topics for discussion include, for example, the representation of sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, as well as the intersections between these categories.

Your Master's programme experience will culminate in a final submission of an extended piece of research and critical writing. At the start of term, you will receive briefings on the nature of the research dissertation process and will be asked to develop a research proposal using the exploration of methodologies or research, documentation and dissemination in taught modules to support your development of a suitable topic. This piece will be on a subject of your choice, which is initially proposed and then agreed with the team. Towards the end of this term these proposals will be presented to a panel of staff and considered for suitability. When a student is choosing a topic of study the negotiation process will refer to the programme content, a student's area of interest and staff expertise. When your proposal is agreed, a supervisor is

appointed. The independent project will be supported by one-to-one supervision by those School members most closely associated with the subject area of your dissertation. In preparation for your dissertation, you will be asked to complete a literature review which will be formatively assessed. The purpose of the literature review is to frame your dissertation topic within the academic scope of your subject area, hence clarifying the focus for your project. Your supervisor will schedule a number of sessions to advise you during the course of your dissertation and formatively evaluate your progress towards the completion of your dissertation. Additional tutorials can be requested if required. The work is carried out as an independent piece of research, with the guidance of the supervisor. Full-time students will undertake their dissertation in the summer. Structures will be established to ensure that they remain on track with their dissertation during the intervening semesters. Students will meet with their supervisor on a number of occasions with up to 10 hours of supervision. It is in these meetings the supervisors will assist the students in a number of ways, which may include: negotiating the precise topic and bibliography, planning their workload, discussing their research strategies, scrutinising research materials they have gathered, and providing advice on outlines and feedback on samples prepared in advance. However, the dissertation must be seen as an independent experience, where the student will be expected to undertake their own research and writing.

Learning, teaching and assessment

The learning and teaching philosophy of the American Studies MA programme concurs with the view that 'time taken talking at students should be minimised while the time for students to be involved actively in the development of their understanding and skills should be maximised and extended beyond the formally scheduled class time into personal and group study' (Hunt, Chalmers & Macdonald, 2013, 22). Learning and teaching on the programme is rooted in critical analysis in which you will be expected to develop your own knowledge, skills and critical faculties in partnership with your tutors and your peers.

To achieve this, the programme will predominately be taught in small seminar discussion groups, where you will have plenty of opportunity to interact with your peers through reflective dialogue. The tutors will establish the body of sources to be examined and will assign seminar papers to individuals or groups, but beyond these seminar papers you will be able to set the agenda on the basis of the material examined.

For all modules on the programme, individual tutorial contact between you and your tutor will be an integral part of the learning experience, allowing for on-going feedback, addressing individual study needs and fostering your personal academic development. You will be able to request a tutorial if required, but tutorial points will also be built into the contact sessions.

Taken as a whole, the MA programme will enable you to better understand the United States as a concept, offer you a window on American Studies as an exciting field of study, and foster the development of transferable skills that should be the essence of 'postgraduate-ness'.

Assessment

American Studies has a historical, literary, cultural and evidence-based approach which requires wide, critical reading and intelligent synthesis of ideas and information. It requires you to construct arguments in writing. All students on the MA programme will receive critical and constructive comments on their progress as an integral part of teaching and learning, through individual meetings with tutors, feedback on written work or specific coursework tutorials. The programme's assessment points will also work as a formative mechanism, which will produce a dialogue between you and your tutors, in order to shape the development of your ideas and goal-orientated educational experience. You will also be formatively assessed in every module. We also place importance in presentations so, as a transferable skill, you will present seminar papers extensively throughout the course of your modules. These will be used as a basis for feedback and will then feed into your written work. These exercises will develop your critical abilities as well as widen your familiarity with, and confidence in handling, a range of sources, preparing you for the modules' summative assessment stage, and the final dissertation.

This programme places a strong emphasis on the development of independent research and writing. The programme's assessment strategies are designed to develop independent research skills; the ability to structure and write a sophisticated critical essay and longer academic monographs, and the opportunity to pursue your own intellectual interests within each module's thematic scope.

Progression and graduation requirements

The University's general [regulations](#) for postgraduate awards apply to this programme.

Any modules that must be passed for progression or award are indicated in the Programme Structure section as non-compensatable.

Internal and external reference points

This programme specification was formulated with reference to:

- [University Mission Statement](#)
- [Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy](#)
- [QAA subject benchmark statement](#)
- [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#)
- QAA quality code for higher education descriptors for qualification at level 7: Master's Degree (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Quality-Code-Chapter-A1.pdf>)
- York St John's 'Qualifications Descriptors' document (YSJU Registry 2011)
- School Assessment Handbook 2011
- The HEA
- YSJU Strategic Plan, 2012-2015
- Hunt, L; Chalmers, D. & Macdonald, R. 'Effective Classroom Teaching', Hunt, L. & Chalmers, D. eds. (2013) *University Teaching in Focus: A Learning Centred Approach*, London: Routledge

Date written / revised: 20/01/2015, July 2017

Programme originally approved: first delivery for this programme is 2017-18