

BA American Studies

UCAS code: T700

Awarding Institution:
Teaching Institution:
Relevant QAA subject benchmarking group(s):
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
For students entering Part 1 in 2004
Programme Director: Dr David Brauner
Programme Adviser: Dr David Brauner
Board of Studies: American Studies
Accreditation: Not appropriate

The University of Reading
The University of Reading
Area Studies
Programme length: 3 years
Date of specification: August 2004

Summary of programme aims

The programme provides a coherent yet versatile course of study which enables students to acquire an understanding, and appreciation, of major aspects of the development of the institutions and culture of the United States. They will be introduced to a broad range of knowledge in the four disciplines of History, Literature, Politics and Film, each of which contributes its own perspective as well as illuminating and complementing the perspectives offered by the others. They will be helped to develop their analytical and critical skills within these disciplines in an overall multi-disciplinary framework. The programme will contribute to the personal and intellectual development of students, in particular by enabling them to spend a period living and studying in the USA.

Transferable skills

The University's Strategy for Teaching and Learning has identified a number of generic transferable skills which all students are expected to have developed by the end of their degree programme. In following this programme, students will have had the opportunity to enhance their skills relating to career management, communication (both written and oral), information handling, numeracy, problem-solving, team working and use of information technology.

This programme will help students to develop the skills of organisation and self-management; the gathering, collation, presentation and interpretation of information; the analysis of texts, both written and visual; fluency in writing and oral communication; the ability to formulate and evaluate their own arguments and those of others; and the ability to work in groups. Through the period of study in the United States the programme will also help students to develop cultural awareness, and the personal qualities of versatility, self-reliance and adaptability.

Programme content

The programme is organised in such a way as to introduce the study of the United States by means of the four constituent disciplines. Students begin by studying all four disciplines in Part 1. They can then decide whether to advance their studies on a broad front, continuing to engage equally with all four disciplines during Parts 2 and 3, or whether to slightly narrow their focus so as to concentrate their work in particular disciplines. 120 credits must be taken in each part. The number of credits for each module is shown after its title. Because American Studies is a multi-disciplinary programme students will not be permitted to take a module outside the programme.

Part 1 (three terms)

Compulsory modules

		<i>Credits</i>	<i>Level</i>
AT1ALF	<i>America since 1945: Literature and Film</i>	20	C
AT1APH	<i>America since 1945: Politics and History</i>	20	C

Optional modules

A total of 40 credits in American Studies will be required to progress to Part 2, though students intending to follow this programme are encouraged to take all 60 offered. If 60 credits are taken in American Studies, 60 credits must be taken from an additional one or two subjects, otherwise 80 credits must be taken from an additional two or more subjects.

Part 2 (three terms)

Part 2 is divided into two sections. The Autumn Term will be spent in Reading. The Spring semester (broadly our Spring Term through to the first weeks of the Summer Term) will be spent on an exchange visit to a university in the United States. Of the 60 credits for the exchange visit 5 credits will be taken up by Careers Management Skills.

Autumn Term:

Students will take three of the following, amounting to 60 credits in all.

		<i>Credits</i>	<i>Level</i>
	One of the following periods of United States History: (NB Not all of these modules will be available in any given year)		
AT2HIA	<i>A People and a Nation: A Social History of The United States, 1815-1945</i>	20	I
AT2HIB	<i>Region, Nation and Global Power. The United States, 1865 to the present</i>	20	I
AT2HIC	<i>American State and Society and the Wider World, 1890-1990</i>	20	I
AT2WR1	<i>Writing America, I</i>	20	I
AT2APG	<i>American Politics and Government</i>	20	I
AT2C1G	<i>US Cinema: Studies in Genre</i>	20	I

Spring Term:

AT2SVA	<i>Study Visit Abroad (including career management skills)</i>	60	I
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Students will take four modules at the exchange university. The best three grades obtained will normally count for assessment.

Part 3 (three terms)

Students will take AT3DIS (40 credits) plus another 80 credits from the options below, of which no more than 20 credits may be at level I.

Compulsory module:

AT3DIS	<i>Dissertation</i>	40	H
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Optional modules:

NB Not all modules listed below will necessarily be available in any year. Admission to such optional modules will be at the discretion of the Programme Director.

AT2	The taught module available but not taken at Part 2, ie One of the following periods of United States History: (NB Not all of these modules will be available in any given year)	20	I
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HIA	<i>A People and a Nation: A Social History of The United States, 1815-1945</i>		
HIB	<i>Region, Nation and Global Power. The United States, 1865 to the present</i>		
HIC	<i>American State and Society and the Wider World, 1890-1990</i>		
AT2WR1	<i>Writing America, 1</i>		
AT2APG	<i>American Politics and Government</i>		
AT2C1G	<i>US Cinema: Studies in Genre</i>		
AT3WIS	<i>Women in Society: a comparison of Britain and America from 1850</i>	20	I
AT3WR2	<i>Writing America, 2</i>	20	I
AT3C1A	<i>US Cinema: Studies in Authorship</i>	20	I
AT3DEB	<i>Debates in American History</i>	20	I
AT3AR1	<i>The American Revolution,</i>	20	H
AT3SC1	<i>Slavery and Slave Culture in the Antebellum USA, A & B</i>	40	H
AT3SC2	<i>Slavery and Slave Culture in the Antebellum USA, B</i>	20	H
AT3INT	<i>'Integrating America'? Immigrants in America, c.1815-1945</i>	20	H
AT3NSO	<i>The 'New South', 1875-1940</i>	20	H
AT3POP	<i>Popular Protest and Political Change in America, 1930-1980</i>	20	H
AT3ND1	<i>The New Deal: The USA and the Legacy of the Great Depression, 1933-1946, A & B</i>	40	H
AT3ND2	<i>The New Deal: The USA and the Legacy of the Great Depression, 1933-1946, B</i>	20	H
AT3MAU	<i>Modern American Utopias</i>	20	H
AT3HJA	<i>Henry James</i>	20	H
AT3AFC	<i>American Fiction: Chopin to Carver</i>	20	H
AT3CWF	<i>Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction</i>	20	H
AT3ATW	<i>Margaret Atwood</i>	20	H
AT3APB	<i>American Poetry: Bishop to Dove</i>	20	H
AT3AAL	<i>African American Literature</i>	20	H
AT3JAF	<i>Jewish American Fiction</i>	20	H
AT3SIR	<i>The American South: Image and Representation</i>	20	H
AT3COF	<i>Contemporary Fiction</i>	20	H
AT3C2A	<i>US Cinema since the 1960s</i>	20	H
AT3NTA	<i>North American Theatre</i>	20	H
AT3MUF	<i>The Musical in Film</i>	20	H
AT3MFA	<i>The Musical in Film and Theatre</i>	20	H
AT3DFT	<i>Documentary in Film and Television</i>	20	H
AT3VWA	<i>The United States and the Vietnam War</i>	20	H
AT3AAR	<i>Anglo-American Relations, 1939 to the present day</i>	20	H
AT3FDP	<i>US Foreign and Defence Policy since 1950</i>	20	H
AT3NAW	<i>Writing the North American Wilderness</i>	20	H
AT3WA	<i>Love and Death: The Films of Woody Allen</i>	20	H

Progression requirements

To progress from Part 1 to Part 2 students must:

- (a) obtain an average of at least 40% over the two compulsory modules.

- (b) achieve an overall average of 40% in 120 credits taken in the Part 1 examination as a whole
- (c) achieve not less than 30% in any module, except that marks of less than 30% in a total of 20 credits may be condoned, provided that the candidate has pursued the course for the module(s) with reasonable diligence and has not been absent from the examination without reasonable cause.

To progress from Part 2 to Part 3 students must:

- (a) achieve an overall average of 40% in 120 credits taken in the Part 2 examination as a whole
- (b) achieve not less than 30% in any module except that marks of less than 30% in a total of 20 credits may be condoned, provided that the candidate has pursued the course for the module(s) with reasonable diligence and has not been absent from the examination without reasonable cause.

To obtain a degree students must have 360 credits of which at least 100 credits are at Honours level. Students who do not qualify for an Honours degree may be entitled to the following qualifications provided that they have obtained the minimum number of credits:

Certificate of Higher Education	120 credits at Certificate level
Diploma of Higher Education	240 credits with at least 100 credits at Intermediate level

Summary of teaching and assessment

A variety of teaching and learning modules will be used throughout the programme. Modules in Parts 1 and 2 units will comprise a mix of lectures and seminars. Seminar teaching will tend to become the dominant mode by Part 3. In the Film part of the programme, screenings represent an important element. Students will be required to prepare for seminar discussion, and will often be asked to start off a class by means of a brief presentation. Essays and other types of written work will allow students to engage in greater depth with particular problems or issues. The dissertation is an independent project which will allow students to research a topic of particular interest to them, and to write about it at a more extended length.

Assessment for most modules is by a combination of examination and essay work completed either during or at the end of the module. Each part will be assessed in the Summer Term of the session in which the module has been taken.

The conventions for classification are provided in the American Studies Handbook. The weighting between Part 2 and Part 3 for classification purposes is 33% and 67%.

Admission requirements

All applicants are considered on their individual merits, and the standard requirements indicated below may be varied if particular cases require it.

Entrants to this programme are normally required to have obtained:

Grade C or better in English in GCSE; and achieved

UCAS Tariff: 260 points from 3 A levels, or 280 points from 3 A levels plus one AS level, not including Key Skills or General Studies.

At least one of A level English Literature, History or Politics preferred.

International Baccalaureat: 30 points

Advanced GNVQ: 12 units at Distinction plus a grade C or above at A level, or 18 units at Distinction

Irish Leaving Certificate: BBBB

Two AS grades are accepted in place of one A-Level

Applications for mature students are welcomed. For mature students, qualifications other than those above may also be acceptable, but an applicant is more likely to receive a place if he or she has undertaken recent study, for example at A level, through the OU, or through an Access course. Potential applicants are recommended to contact the admissions tutor to discuss their individual circumstances.

Enquiries can be made through the Admissions Secretary, Mrs P Taylor.
Telephone: 0118 378 6058; e-mail: Insalpam@reading.ac.uk

Support for students and their learning

University support for students and their learning falls into two categories. Learning support includes IT Services, which has several hundred computers and the University Library, which across its three sites holds over a million volumes, subscribes to around 4,000 current periodicals, has a range of electronic sources of information and houses the Student Access to Independent Learning (S@IL) computer-based teaching and learning facilities. There are language laboratory facilities both for those students studying on a language degree and for those taking modules offered by the Institution-wide Language Programme. Student guidance and welfare support is provided by Personal Tutors, the Careers Advisory Service, the University's Special Needs Advisor, Study Advisors, Hall Wardens and the Students' Union.

Within the American Studies programme each student is assigned a Personal Tutor from among the programme teaching team. The Personal Tutor is a key source of advice and assistance throughout the programme. Students meet regularly with their personal tutor to review progress within the formal structure provided by the University's Personal Academic Record Scheme (PAR). Handbooks are provided for the different parts of the programme. The Director and the programme secretary are available to help and guide students through their programme. A structured programme of advice is provided to assist preparation for the period of study in the United States, and close liaison is maintained with the International Offices of our exchange partner universities. Specific sessions are arranged to assist students with the use of library and other research resources, and in the initiation of research for the dissertation. Each student is assigned an individual dissertation supervisor. Regular feedback is provided by modules' teachers both in writing and verbally. Progress is monitored through written reports provided by teachers to the Personal Tutor at the end of each term.

Career prospects

American Studies students receive a training in a number of disciplines, within the overall framework provided by studying a particular area. They will have acquired a variety of intellectual and transferable skills, and will also have developed personal qualities such as self-reliance and adaptability. These are all things which are valued by employers. Our graduates have in the past gone into a wide variety of careers. Some of course go on to study further, either in American Studies or in its component disciplines, or to prepare themselves to work in those subject areas as teachers or researchers. Some also go on to more specialised training for a career in professions such as law, banking, or accountancy. Many join national companies to develop careers in general management, retailing, or marketing. Others go into administration in areas such as central or local government. A number find careers in the areas of the arts, the media, and the entertainment industry.

Opportunities for study abroad or for placements

The semester spent during the second year at a university institution in the United States is an integral, and particularly valuable part of the programme.

Educational aims of the programme

The programme aims to give students a sound knowledge and understanding of the forces which have shaped the past development and contemporary state of the United States, and the way in which the nation's sense of itself has been scrutinised and challenged by writers and film makers. It aims to give them a familiarity with the methods, theories, and the debates of the contributing disciplines, and to equip them to develop their own arguments and responses.

Programme Outcomes

The programme provides opportunities for students to develop knowledge and understanding, skills, qualities and other attributes in the following areas:

Knowledge and Understanding

<p>A. Knowledge and understanding of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. the main features of the character and development of the institutions and culture of the United States, from the perspectives of the disciplines of History, Politics, Literature and Film2. the main events and developments in the history of the United States during the nineteen and twentieth centuries, and the forces involved in promoting change3. the character and functioning of the institutions of American government and politics in both theory and practice4. key representative American literary texts, and the way in which they reflect some of the principal concerns of American self-representation5. the character of popular American cinema, and the main types of discourse used in film studies6. the nature of the debates, the key issues involved, and the concepts and methods utilised, within the respective disciplines7. a selection of specific topics in one of more of the contributing disciplines	<p>Teaching/learning methods and strategies Knowledge and understanding are gained through formal teaching (lectures, seminar discussions, and individual feedback). Students prepare for seminars and for the production of written work through independent reading. Certificate level modules offer a broad introduction to America since 1945, which is then built on through the further study of three of the four disciplines at Intermediate level. More specialised topics of study are investigated during the period of study in the US, and through the dissertation and options at Honours level. The Study Visit contributes to knowledge of the contemporary US.</p> <p><i>Assessment</i> Unseen written examinations and coursework or summative essays, either separately or in combination depending on the specific module, plus a dissertation</p>
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Skills and other attributes

B. Intellectual skills – able to:

1. accumulate, select, and apply information in a structured way
2. identify and analyse problems and issues
3. understand and evaluate different critical perspectives and their modes of expression
4. formulate clear, coherent, and structured arguments
5. show independence in research and interpretation
6. make comparative judgements across periods, genres and cultures

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

Intellectual skills are acquired and developed throughout the programme. Awareness is generated and guidance is provided in lectures, seminars, handbooks, and individual feedback. Exposure to issues and problems is provided by individual reading and viewing of films, and through seminar discussion. Opportunities for the application and development of skills is given through work assignments in a variety of formats.

Assessment

The balance between the different skills will vary between the different disciplines. Both written examinations and assessed essays assess skills 1-6. The dissertation in particular assesses a variety of intellectual skills.

C. Practical skills – able to:

1. identify, locate, and synthesise relevant information from a variety of sources
2. use and evaluate the appropriate primary and secondary texts
3. present findings and analysis orally and in writing
4. present accurate work according to the appropriate conventions of the respective disciplines
5. engage in group discussion and debate
6. organise and negotiate a period of residence and study abroad
7. show critical self-awareness and the ability to reflect on their own work

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

Practical skills are developed through the preparation and delivery of course assignments. Research projects and the dissertation in particular develop research skills, and are supported by guidance sessions involving the liaison librarian. Work with texts or primary sources is a key component of work in literature and film, and also in options in history. Written work, plus oral presentations, develop the ability to present information and conclusions in an appropriate format. Feedback is provided both in writing and orally. Seminar discussion and debate is part of all modules. The period spent at a university in the US is a compulsory part of the programme. Critical self-awareness is developed through the discussion of progress with the personal tutor and through the PAR system. It is also developed during discussion of work-in-progress at different states, especially the dissertation.

Assessment

Timed examinations, assessed essays of differing lengths, and the dissertation assess 1, written communication under 3, and 4. Oral communication is not directly assessed. The successful negotiation of the study visit is reflected in the marks gained at the exchange university which form an element in the final degree assessment.

D. Transferable skills – able to:

1. communicate clearly and accurately in written and oral formats
2. manage time and meet deadlines
3. take responsibility for the planning of educational and career development
4. show awareness of cultural differences and the ability to learn about another culture
5. make appropriate use of Information and Communications Technology.
6. develop adaptability and self-reliance

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

Transferable skills are developed throughout the programme. Many of them are not assessed directly, but are nonetheless essential to the successful completion of the programme and to the achievement of a high degree classification. Clear and accurate communication is essential in all work. The failure to meet deadlines is penalised by the deduction of marks. Students are involved in choosing the options which they will take while in the US. The Careers Management Skills module assesses their progress in career development. Participation in the study visit enhances the development of adaptability and self-reliance. ICT is used to access research materials, and to communicate both within the university and during the period in the US

Please note: This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably expect to achieve and demonstrate if he/she takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found in module and programme handbooks.