American Studies

Overview

Our American studies program is one of the strongest in the country, and every year it is among the top majors at Connecticut College. We focus on two critical issues: race and ethnicity and the role of the United States in the world. The program is innovative, dynamic and interdisciplinary. After you complete the core requirements for the major, you have the opportunity to concentrate on comparative race and ethnicity; expressive arts and cultural studies; or politics, society and policy. You also participate in community service, fieldwork or an internship. Our graduates are shaping thinking about critical issues in government and non-governmental organizations, and in graduate studies and academia.

Personalized Learning

You shape your own experience through the courses you choose, as well as through your honors or independent study project. Student research topics have included the representation of adolescent sexuality on reality television and its impact on behavior, a critical look at dolls created for young girls in America, and a comparison of religious tolerance in France and the United States.

International Opportunities and Study Abroad

American studies majors have examined the role of American culture in the de-Nazification of Germany as well as the impact of Eastern European training methods on American sports. A course on immigration took students to the Texas/ Mexico border, where they lived with local families. Our civil rights seminar has traveled to important locations of the African-American freedom movement.

Carter Goffigon
American Studies, Dance

Q: Why American Studies
A: Like most freshmen, my interests were all over the place, but I was interested in the experience and history of people. I’d always loved history but also wanted to be able to nurture my interest in art, culture and gender studies. A friend suggested I look into American Studies with its emphasis on interdisciplinary work. I took the Intro to American Studies class with Professor [James] Downs in sophomore year and was hooked.

Q: Which class has been most challenging or rewarding?
A: In Professor Downs’s seminar, “19th Century America,” we were required each week to read an entire book, develop an analytical argument and write a short response paper. The challenge to independently craft an insightful and organized analysis was, by no means, easy, but was so rewarding. The nine of us in class met weekly for an exhausting and thrilling three hours led by Professor Downs that strengthened my skills as a historian, writer and thinker.

Q: What independent or faculty-led research have you done?
A: A ConnSSHARP grant gave me the opportunity to work with Professor Downs on his developing book project about cholera, epidemiology and their relationship to colonialism and transnationalism in the 19th century. I spent the summer in the NY Public Library and NY Academy of Medicine, collecting and analyzing archival documents, and meeting with Professor Downs to discuss my findings and how they answered the overarching questions of the project. This gave me invaluable insight into the research process and what it means to live as a historian as I move ahead with my own honors thesis project: Domestic Kitchens in 19th Century America.
Selected Courses

Introduction to American Studies; Theorizing Race and Ethnicity; Politics and Culture in The United States Since 1917; History of Sexuality; African-American History; Latin American Immigration and Migration; The Globalization of American Culture Since 1945

About Connecticut College

Connecticut College is a private, highly selective liberal arts college with 1,850 students and more than 40 majors in the arts, sciences, social sciences and humanities, and the option for students to self-design majors. The College offers a high level of intellectual challenge, and a campus culture that supports students to tailor their educational experience to their own interests and goals. A four-year career development program teaches students how to translate a liberal arts degree into a first job or graduate school admission. Connecticut College is situated in the small New England seaport of New London.

Faculty

David Canton, Associate Professor of History; Chair of the History Department
B.A., Morehouse College;
M.A., The Ohio State University; Ph.D., Temple University
Twentieth-century American social history; civil rights movement, urban history, hip-hop music and black culture in post-industrial America

David Kyuman Kim, Associate Professor of Religious Studies
B.A., University of Rochester;
M.Div. & Th.D., Harvard University
Philosophy of religion; religion and critical theory; religion and political theory; modern and contemporary religious thought; human agency; moral philosophy and ethics; religious theory; Asian-American studies

Julie Rivkin, Professor of English, Chair of the English Department
B.A., Ph.D., Yale University
American literature; Gender studies and contemporary literature; Literary theory; Henry James

James Downs, Associate Professor of History
B.A., University of Pennsylvania; M.A., Ph.D., Columbia University
Nineteenth-century United States history; African-American studies; History of medicine and public health; history of medicine and public health

Jen Manion, Associate Professor of History; Director of LGBTQ Center
B.A., University of Pennsylvania; Ph.D., Rutgers University
Gender and sexuality; women and social movements; early America

Catherine McNicol Stock, Professor of History; Director of the American Studies Program
Barbara Zaccheo Kohn '72
B.A., M.A., Ph.D., Yale University
Rural radicalism and domestic terrorism; social, cultural and political history of the United States, 1877 to present, including the American West; rural America; the Great Depression and the New Deal

Examples of Student Research in American Studies

Carter Goffigon '14
Make Me a Sandwich: A Cultural History of the Domestic Kitchen in 19th Century America

Annie Anderson '12
When the Mainstream Met the Second Wave: Media Representations of Women & Feminism in 1970s America

Heather Day '09
“Hey Young World”: Hip-Hop as a Tool for Educational and Rehabilitative Work with Youth

For more information, visit www.conncoll.edu/academics/