

DOCTORAL STUDENT HANDBOOK

Department of American Studies

2022 Edition

americanstudies.unc.edu

(Updated in November of 2022)

Program Description

The graduate program in American Studies provides rigorous yet flexible training in a range of theoretical perspectives and research methodologies building on the interdisciplinary history of our scholarly pursuit. Our program emphasizes intersectionality as a mode of scholarship, mode of teaching, and mode of being. We value creative, ethically-centered, and community-focused work. We prepare and encourage students to explore the complex, variable, and contested nature of what it means to be American. We recognize that this requires examining many kinds of evidence derived from multiple sources and genres (archival materials, oral history, literature, popular culture, music, art, food, bodily movement and adornment, landscape, architecture, belief), accessed via multiple methodologies (historical, literary, ethnographic, and digital) and analyzed via theoretical perspectives that attend to race, gender, and sexuality; aesthetics and politics; region and transnational connection.

The program prepares both those who aim to teach at the college and university levels in American Studies and related fields (including American Indian Studies, literature, history, art history, cultural studies, and folklore) and those who aim to pursue careers in museums, historical sites, archives, libraries, or publishing or to apply American Studies perspectives in other professional settings.

All American Studies Ph.D. students take three required courses that provide grounding in the history, theory, and methodologies of American Studies. Students choose additional coursework inside and outside the department in accordance with their specific interests, and each student develops three individual areas of specialization, drawing on the strengths of the department and peer departments at UNC-CH, including art, cultural studies, literary studies, intellectual history, religious studies, American Indian and Indigenous Studies, folklore, African-American Studies, and more. Students take comprehensive examinations in two areas of specialization.

Students may complete a master's degree on their way to their doctoral degree. Students who enter with an M.A. in American Studies or a closely related field may apply to transfer up to 9 hours of approved graduate credit toward the doctoral degree. In addition to coursework, requirements for the Ph.D. include proficiency in one language other than English (**or** one of the other research proficiencies outlined below), written and oral qualifying examinations, a dissertation prospectus, and the dissertation.

Coursework Evaluation

Grades: For graduate courses, *H* for work that is clearly excellent, *P* for work that is entirely satisfactory, *L* for work that is marginal but passing, and *F* for work that is failing. Plus and minus grades are recorded by the Department but not by the Graduate School.

Satisfactory Progress: If a student earns 3 or more Ps or one L in the first year, the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) may meet to evaluate the student's record. Students who receive 2 incompletes in the first year will also be evaluated. The GAC and the faculty who have taught this student will meet to discuss progress and determine whether they should continue in the program. A doctoral student who receives a single grade of F or 3 L grades is ineligible to continue in the Graduate School.

Incompletes: Incompletes are to be avoided when possible. Students may not take more than one Incomplete per semester. While the Graduate School policy states that students have a full calendar year to finish incomplete work, the department stipulates that faculty must come to a specific agreement with the student, setting the earliest due date possible. A grade of Incomplete can be rectified no later than two weeks before the exam period in the semester that the incomplete work is due. An Incomplete (or AB) must be removed by the deadline or the grade becomes an F. Incompletes (and ABs) must be removed before the student can graduate or take a leave of absence.

Research Proficiency Certification for Doctoral Students in American Studies

The Department of American Studies requires its doctoral students to select and develop an individualized proficiency that will improve the quality and impact of their research and enhance the capacity they will wield in their professional lives. This empowers students to add value to their education by defining and pursuing an enabling skill set that can deepen the dimensions of their research, practice, and service.

Examples of useful proficiencies might include:

- the study of a relevant language other than English, including Cherokee offered in our Department;
- ethnographic field work;
- oral history interview and recording techniques;
- digital modes of coding, mapping, and visualization;
- training in the processes of public planning and policy;
- facility in survey methods and quantitative analysis;
- skills in documentary production;
- archival curation and museum programming.

Research Proficiency Requirements

The proficiency must be in addition to or extend the skillset that students bring with them at matriculation.

Certification of this proficiency is met by two requirements:

- the completion of at least one course or an equivalent process of training
- a practical demonstration of its acquisition.

The course can be a graduate or undergraduate course, but it must teach the proficiency that is being sought. Only one graduate course can count toward the credit requirements for completing the degree. The student may propose a coherent plan of training equivalent to the 100 hours of a three-credit hour course if that path is more conducive to acquiring the skill, or if a course does not exist that teaches the desired proficiency.

Demonstration of the proficiency acquired must be achieved by an application of the skills learned through an outcome additional to that prepared for the course. This result might include a presentation at a conference or a public-facing project.

A student may select the study of a language that is directly relevant to their research to certify this research proficiency. The application must explain why the language is relevant, the extent of their present competency, to their research and how their plan enables them to gain proficiency. Certification can be achieved through course work and a traditional competency exam in that language ([more on that exam here](#)), or by extending their capacity with a language with which they already have some skill through coursework or tutor training and a means of demonstrating their added capacity.

The earning of a relevant graduate certificate approved by the Graduate School (such as in Digital Humanities, Participatory Research, Survey Methodology, Geographic Information Sciences) will count for this requirement.

The Department can assist doctoral students by training advisors in the schedule and procedure for applying, attaining, and certifying this proficiency requirement. Paths to proficiency might be paved with further consultation and affiliation with such organizations as the Southern Oral History Program, the Digital Innovation Lab, Duke's Center for Documentary Studies, Carolina Public Humanities, and the Carolina Center for Public Service.

Process for Planning and Certifying the Proficiency

Incoming doctoral students have the responsibility to work with their preliminary advisor to select a proficiency and prepare a plan for its attainment before they complete their prospectus and become candidates for the Ph.D. A written application on a Departmental form will spell out which skill set they will acquire to meet this certification, describe the extent of their present competency, explain why it is relevant to their research, and outline how their plan enables them to gain proficiency. Incoming students will submit their proposal to the Graduate Studies Committee by October 1 of their first semester. This Committee will meet to approve or suggest alterations to this proposal by November 15.

Students who are already enrolled may appeal to allow a research proficiency to replace the existing language if they are able to develop a plan of acquisition for completion and certification.

At the end of the fall of the third year, the DGS will follow up and confirm with students and their dissertation directors whether the benchmarks of attainment have been fulfilled, and if not, what plan is in place to complete the requirement.

PhD Course of Study

Our PhD program is designed to take four to five years to complete. Here's how you get to graduation:

1. Required coursework
2. Proficiency requirement
3. Dissertation proposal
4. Comprehensive examinations
5. Dissertation prospectus
6. Dissertation

Yearly Requirements and Milestones

Year One

Coursework

In fall of year one, all students take AMST 700 (History and Practices of American Studies) together as a cohort, and two electives that students select on their own. Students may consult with their advisor, search keywords on ConnectCarolina, or browse course offerings from relevant departments to select their electives.

In spring of year one, all students take AMST 701 (Research Methods in American Studies) together as a cohort, and two electives that students select on their own.

Milestones

In spring of year one, students that are planning to earn a MA on their path to the PhD should work with their advisor to identify a research topic and start to assemble a MA committee of their primary advisor and two additional faculty members from our department. Students should submit their proposal for planning and certifying their proficiency to the Graduate Studies Committee by October 1 of their first semester.

Funding

Students will receive Teaching Assistant placements or other work placements in the department. Starting in the fall semester, students should work with their advisors to identify summer funding

sources. Students may look towards academic centers at UNC relevant to their research, libraries, and scholarly organizations for grants and fellowships. Faculty may hire students over the summer as Graduate Research Consultants or Teaching Assistants for summer school courses or for research. During the first year of Study at UNC, out-of-state students should work towards the requirements for attaining NC residency. Students can contact the Graduate Student Services Manager for more information on this process.

Year Two

Coursework

In fall of year two, students take three elective courses. Students earning a MA will take AMST 901 as one of their electives; 901 is an independent study focused on MA design taught by the student's advisor. Students working on a MA are encouraged to convene a MA writing group to work together towards deadlines and share insights from their individual 901 experiences.

In spring of year two, all students will take AMST 902/993 together as a cohort, and two electives. AMST 993 is MA Writing and AMST 902 is Project Design. 902 and 993 are taught by the same instructor and meet at the same time. The course results in either 1) a complete MA thesis and conference proposal/presentation for students earning a MA 2) a conference and academic paper for students interested in academic publications or 3) a conference and public facing project (museum, digital, etc.) for students who are not interested in academic publications, or 4) another scholarly product of comparable rigor agreed to by the student and their advisor and/or instructor.

Milestones

In spring of year two, students should work with their advisor to draft comprehensive exam lists and assemble their exams committee of three faculty members, one of whom can be outside the department. Comprehensive exams are comprised of two written exams that are later defended in a single oral defense. Students are allotted 8 hours for each comprehensive exam and a defense typically lasts around 90 minutes. All students take an American Studies exam directed by the instructor of 903 and drawn from readings in 700 and 701 (30 books) and cohort collaboration (15 books). Each student also takes a specialized field exam directed by their advisor.

In spring of year two, students earning a MA will defend their MA thesis to their MA committee and receive their MA degree from the department.

In summer after year two, students should begin reading for their comprehensive exams.

Funding

Students will receive Teaching Assistant placements or other work placements in the department. Starting in the fall semester, out-of-state students should apply for NC residency, and should contact the Graduate Student Service Manager for information and assistance with this process. Students should work with their advisors to identify summer funding sources. Students may look towards academic centers at UNC relevant to their research, libraries, and scholarly organizations for grants and fellowships. Faculty may hire students over the summer as Graduate Research Consultants or Teaching Assistants for summer school courses or for research.

Year Three

Coursework

In fall of year three, all students will take AMST 990 (directed readings) with the faculty person directing their field exam, AMST 903 together as a cohort, and an elective. AMST 903 is dedicated to comprehensive exam preparation for the first half of the semester and dissertation prospectus development for the second half of the semester.

In spring of year three, all students enroll in AMST 994 (dissertation hours).

Milestones

In fall of year three, students schedule and take their written comprehensive exams as part of their participation in AMST 903. The oral defense of both exams takes place at the end of the fall semester or no later than January 31 of the spring semester. After defending exams, students should work with their advisor to assemble a dissertation committee of five faculty members, one of which can be outside the institution and one of which can be a UNC faculty person from a different department

Students may defend their prospectus in front of that five-person committee at the end of fall semester or in the spring semester, no later than January 31. The prospectus is an overview of the student's research question, sources, core argument, and chapters of the dissertation and is defended before the dissertation committee. Once students have defended their prospectus, they are ABD and advance to candidacy. Students begin dissertation research in the summer after year three.

Funding

Students will receive Teaching Assistant placements or other work placements in the department. Starting in the fall semester, students should work with their advisors to identify summer funding sources and dissertation research fellowships. Students may look towards academic centers at UNC relevant to their research, libraries, and scholarly organizations for grants and fellowships. Faculty may hire students over the summer as Graduate Research Consultants or Teaching Assistants for summer school courses or for research.

PhD candidates are able to teach their own courses as Teaching Fellows. Candidates may begin to teach their own summer school courses in the summer between years three and four and . Teaching Fellows must submit an approved Statement of Teaching before teaching their own class.

Year Four

Coursework

All students enroll in AMST 994 for the fall and spring semesters.

Milestones

Students should meet with their full dissertation committee once a year after successful defense of their prospectus and until successful defense of their dissertation.

Funding

Students without fellowship funding will receive Teaching Fellow or Teaching Assistant placements or other work placements in the department (social media, etc). Starting in the fall semester, students should work with their advisors to identify summer funding sources and dissertation completion fellowships. Students may look towards academic centers at UNC relevant to their research, libraries, and scholarly organizations for grants and fellowships. Faculty may hire students over the summer as Graduate Research Consultants or Teaching Assistants for summer school courses or for research.

Year Five

Coursework

All students enroll in AMST 994 for the fall and spring semesters.

Milestones

Students should meet with their full dissertation committee once a year after successful defense of their prospectus and until successful defense of their dissertation. Students will complete all the necessary steps to apply for Graduation on ConnectCarolina. Students should defend their thesis during the spring semester, no later than the first week of April. Students will then make any final edits to their dissertation prior to the deadline to submit electronic dissertations to the Graduate School. See the Graduate School Graduation Deadlines [here](#). Reach out to the GSSM with any questions.

Funding

Students without fellowship funding will receive Teaching Fellow or Teaching Assistant placements or other work placements in the department.

Committee Composition and Comprehensive Examinations

Committee Composition

Students should form their committees by the middle of their third year of study. One member of the committee will act as the dissertation director (student's choice, in consultation with faculty member in question). Often, but not always, the dissertation director is also the committee chair. The committee chair oversees the organization of exam paperwork and consults with the instructor of 903 on exam questions. The dissertation committee will be comprised of five members of the faculty (no more), three of which must hold tenure-track positions in the student's home department. Exceptions to this rule can be made to the Director of Graduate Studies, who requests exemption from the Graduate School. If you plan to include a faculty member from another institution on your committee, please submit a copy of their CV to the GSSM. The Committee Composition Form can be found under the "Graduate Forms" tab on the Intranet.

Comprehensive Examinations

Candidates for the PhD must pass two written examinations administered by the Department: the American Studies Exam and the Subject Field Exam. Students must then pass an oral defense conducted by the student's exam committee, constituted by three faculty members. Students must be enrolled in AMST 903 in the fall of their third year to prepare for these examinations, and should consult with members of their committee regularly as they prepare.

The goals of the comprehensive exams in American Studies are to:

- Demonstrate mastery of major concepts, themes, and theories and show understanding of essential works in the field of American Studies and in your chosen sub-field.
- Demonstrate capacity to synthesize existing scholarship and craft arguments with it.

Comps are comprised of two open-note written exams (8 hours each) that are later defended in a single oral examination (approximately 90 minutes).

1. American Studies Exam: Drawn from readings in 700 and 701 (30 books) and cohort collaboration (15 books). Administered by the instructor of 903 unless an exception is made.
2. Subject Field Exam: A combination of a discipline (e.g. 20th Century American History) and subdiscipline (e.g., American Indian justice movements). 45 books. Directed by the student's advisor.

At the time of their oral exam, students must bring a record of their external (at UNC and/or outside UNC) professionalization exercises.

Departmental Policies and Opportunities

These policies may be updated at the discretion of the Graduate Student Services Manager and the Registrar.

Dissertation

Dissertations produced by students in the Department of American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill make original, significant contributions to clearly defined fields of research in the discipline. Dissertations will make clear, coherent arguments, will incorporate sufficient research in secondary criticism, and will demonstrate mastery of research methods.

Students are expected to incorporate feedback before submitting a final draft. All students must convene their committee at least once annually after achieving ABD status, meaning students should have no fewer than two full committee meetings before their defense.

Dissertation Prospectus & Progress

Prospectus: The dissertation prospectus is a document that describes the dissertation as planned. You will write your prospectus in AMST 903.

- Definition and length: The prospectus should be between twelve and fifteen pages long (3000 to 3750 words) and should contain a brief abstract of the project as a whole, a brief literature review, a proposed chapter outline, and a longer rationale and justification for the project.
- Timing: The prospectus must be defended no later than the end of January in the spring of the student's third year. Students are responsible for organizing the date and time of the prospectus meeting; DGS can step in and help with scheduling if need be. Students must contact the Graduate Student Services Manager with the date and time; the GSSM reserves a room and prepares paperwork for the chair. All five members of the dissertation committee must be present at the Prospectus Meeting.

Following a successful prospectus defense, a student is "ABD" and can proceed with dissertation research and eventually writing.

- Chapter Meeting: Students must hold a meeting with at least three members of the dissertation committee (including the director) in the semester following the prospectus meeting, with the aim of having one or more chapters to discuss. Students are responsible for organizing the date and time of the prospectus meeting; DGS can step in and help with scheduling if need be. Students must contact the Graduate Student Services Manager with date and time; the GSSM reserves a room.
- Full Committee Meeting: Students must constitute a full committee meeting at least annually for every academic year after successful defense of their prospectus.

Dissertation Defense & Submission

Dissertation Defense: The final oral is in a strict sense a defense of the dissertation, and it should be approached as such; the students should be ready to explain and justify the argument, and to state with clarity its original contribution to the discipline. The student may be called on to discuss methodology, plans for revision, and trends in the field. The defense takes place no later than the spring semester of the student's fifth year.

- Scheduling the Defense: Students are responsible for organizing the date and time of the defense; DGS can step in and help with scheduling if need be. Students must contact the Graduate Student Services Manager with date and time; GSSM reserves a room and prepares paperwork for the chair.
- Required Revisions: At the time of the defense but no later, the committee may require revisions to the dissertation. The dissertation advisor will be responsible for ensuring that the required revisions have been made.
- Dissertation Submission: The dissertation must conform to the format outlined in the [Thesis and Dissertation Guide at the Graduate School](#). The student files the final dissertation with the Graduate School, [here](#). It is the student's responsibility to adhere to the dates and deadlines set forth by the Graduate School, [here](#).
- Dissertation Abstract: Students are expected to include with their dissertations an abstract of no more than 350 words. University Microfilms International publishes *Dissertation Abstracts International*, which includes a copy of every UNC doctoral student's dissertation abstract. University Microfilms International will not publish doctoral abstracts that exceed 350 words.

Graduation and Defenses

Students must apply to graduate with the Graduate School via ConnectCarolina in the semester during which the student intends to defend the dissertation.

The dissertation must conform to the format outline in [the Thesis and Dissertation Guide at the Graduate School](#). The student files the final dissertation with the Graduate School. The student is responsible for finding out the filing date; the Graduate Student Services Manager can help.

Be sure to check with the [Graduate School](#) for all deadlines related to graduation.

Registration

UNC Registrar: Please see the registrar's website for instructions on how to register and pertinent deadlines

Students must be registered full-time to hold a University Fellowship. This includes Teaching Fellowships, Research Assistantships, Non-Service Awards, etc.

Students who are teaching and enrolled in fewer than three courses are considered under-enrolled by the Graduate School, and this comes with heavy financial penalties. However, full-time registration can also be achieved by registering for nine or more hours (three classes) OR registering for three hours of 992/993/994 (with or without credit hours for other courses). Advanced students registered only in 992/993/994 are considered full-time students.

When students do not register for courses during any given semester, they must apply for readmission.

Auditing courses is permitted but not encouraged, given the additional time commitment. Students must have permission from the instructor to audit.

Dissertation Hours (AMST 994) and Directed Readings (AMST 895): You need only register for 3 credits in these classes. You may register for dissertation hours for multiple semesters. It is important to register under the appropriate instructor's section number when registering for any of these classes. Please contact the Graduate Student Service Manager if you do not see your advisor or instructor assigned to a section.

If a student needs to underload before they are ABD, students may submit [a Waiver of Hours form](#). This form can be found on The Graduate School website and on the departmental Intranet. This form requests to The Graduate School that the student be considered full-time without being enrolled in 9 hours of coursework or 3 hours of 992/993/994. Waiver of Hour forms are used in the following scenarios:

- A student only needs one course to finish coursework requirements and is not yet ABD
- A student only needs two courses to finish coursework requirements and is not yet ABD
- The student's overall academic involvement, including research projects and stand-alone teaching assignments, combined with six credit hours of course enrollment, is consistent with full-time status

All Waiver of Hour requests must be submitted to the Graduate Student Services **Manager no later than 1 week before the start of classes**. The form will then be sent to the DGS for assessment based on the graduate student's progress to degree. Should the DGS approve the waiver request, it will be reviewed and signed by the Chair of the department before being submitted to the Graduate School for further review and approval.

Students who are receiving tuition remission (payment for out-of-state tuition) are responsible for dropping any unwanted classes **by the last day to drop a course for financial credit**. This is usually two weeks after the first day of classes. If you drop a course during this time, you must inform the

Graduate Student Services Manager. See the [Registrar's calendar](#) to find the deadline for each semester. Students who drop after this date are responsible for paying for the dropped classes.

Students registered for at least three credit hours on this campus may take graduate courses at North Carolina State University, UNC-Charlotte, UNC-Greensboro, North Carolina Central University, and Duke University. Students must fill out the Inter-Institutional Approval Form and have it approved by the DGS. Tuition will be calculated as if the registration were for a course offered at UNC.

A minimum residence credit of four full semesters, which must be spent in continuous registration on this campus, is required of all PhD students. Two of these semesters must comprise contiguous registration of at least six hours each; the remaining two may be earned over a longer period of time and during noncontiguous semesters, if so desired. All must be earned through UNC-CH registration—transfer credits cannot be applied. Residence credit earned on work for a master's degree at UNC-CH is applicable as residence credit for a doctoral degree. The residence credit requirement should be completed before the doctoral written examinations and oral exam defense are taken.

Contact Information

It is the responsibility of every graduate student to have a current address and phone number listed in ConnectCarolina.

It is the responsibility of every graduate student to thoroughly read and respond to emails.

All graduate students are assigned mailboxes in the mailroom located in the Bain Staff room (GL 219). Students are encouraged to check their boxes at least once a week.

Transferring Course Credit

Students who enter with an M.A. in American Studies or a closely related field may apply to transfer up to 9 hours of approved graduate credit toward the doctoral degree. Graduate coursework must be from accredited institutions. Grades earned on transferred must be at least a B. The transferred courses will not count toward the student's program residence credit calculation.

Students who wish to transfer course credit should use the [Transfer Credit Recommendation Form](#). This form can be found on the Graduate School website and the Departmental Intranet. Each transferred course must have a corresponding course at UNC-CH. Use the [Course Catalog](#) to search for corresponding courses.

Transfer credit requests are sent to the DGS for approval, then to the GSSM for processing with the Graduate School.

Conferences and Travel Funding

For students entering the program with a BA, it is reasonable to begin attending conferences after one's exams. For those entering with an MA, it is reasonable to begin attending conferences starting in your second year. While graduate conferences are enjoyable, they do relatively little for your CV. The department thus recommends that students try to attend regular conferences instead. Talk to your advisor or other mentors about how to apply to present at a conference.

Students may apply for and receive travel funding to a conference at which they are presenting once in their tenure as a student with the department. Applications can be found under the "Graduate Forms" tab on the Intranet. There are also travel grants available from the Graduate and Professional Student Federation and other campus centers.

Dissertation Fellowships

The Graduate School offers a limited number of dissertation fellowships that release students from teaching to concentrate on writing the dissertation. More information can be found on the [Graduate School website](#).

Residency

If you are an out-of-state student, we ask that you apply for residency for tuition purposes once you are eligible. This significantly reduces the cost of your tuition and allows us to support more students in our program. More information can be found on the [Graduate School website](#). Students should take steps toward residency in their first year so that they may secure residency in the fall of their second year. Contact the GSSM for assistance and information.

Leaves

A graduate student may request a leave of absence from graduate study for up to one year. During an official LOA, the student does not plan to make academic progress. Students should consult with the DGS about their intention to take a leave; DGS and GSSM will assist in submitting the proper forms to the Graduate School for Approval. Students should check the [Graduate School Handbook](#) for associated restrictions.

Miscellaneous

Graduate students are eligible for study carrels located in the book stacks of Davis Library. Students may obtain applications for carrels at the Circulation Desk of Davis. These applications should be signed by the advisor or the Director of Graduate Studies.