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American Studies: A Case Study of Interdisciplinarity

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Introduction

American Studies is an interesting case for considering both the promise and potential pitfalls of interdisciplinarity. American Studies has been developed and promoted since the 1940s (its roots go back even further) explicitly to overcome the limitations of established academic fields, in particular the way literature and history were taught in traditional departments. The early leaders in this field sought to examine the unexamined spaces between literature and history and to develop a more integrated understanding of American society. As we will see, while the particular intellectual focus of American Studies scholars shifted substantially over the decades, the drive to break down arbitrary academic barriers and to explore new intellectual frontiers is a thread that connects American Studies scholarship over the decades.

A strong case can be made for American Studies in terms of the vitality of its scholarship, yet in organizational terms, American Studies can at best only be deemed a limited success. On the positive side of the ledger, the American Studies Association has endured, and even thrived; American Studies programs have become established in 50 countries, and more than thirty American Studies journals are published in 28 countries. On the other hand, American Studies never became a standard academic department with control of its own academic appointments in most colleges and universities in the United States. Even at its peak of popularity in the early 1970s, a mere two-tenths of one percent of undergraduates obtained their degrees in American Studies, and only a slightly higher fraction of doctorates were granted in this field. American Studies programs are located in less than 10 percent of American colleges and universities. American Studies did not become a self-contained academic market, producing its own Phds with a secure hold on faculty appointments in American Studies departments, features that Abbott (2001), Turner (2000) and others take as the quintessential defining characteristics of an academic discipline. Indeed, most of the presidents of the American

Studies association over the last 20 years had their principal appointments in either English or History departments.

From the outside looking in, it is clear that American Studies represents another province in the broad landscape of the humanities rather than a powerful force for the unification of humanistic scholarship. For all of the lofty rhetoric about the integration of the study of literature, history and sometimes even the social sciences in an integrated account of American society, American Studies never displaced the traditional departments of English and history. The connection with social science fields such as anthropology, economics, political science and sociology was tenuous throughout most of its 60 year history. Nor did American studies ever achieve complete integration internally: Americanists are divided by their training largely into historians on the one hand and literary scholars on the other. American Studies scholars are also divided along generational lines, the period they study and increasingly by a diverse array of research specialties.

Does this history mean that American Studies was a bad idea that should never been pursued? Of course not. Many doctoral candidates trained in American Studies programs became accomplished scholars and authors, including the current president of Harvard, Drew Gilpin Faust. American Studies scholars also may have helped to encourage the transformation of English and history, which have changed substantially over the 60 year period we examine here.

The experience of American Studies, however, also suggests that the simple moniker “interdisciplinary” is no panacea. American Studies as a field has been subject to many of the same limitations and concerns as the established disciplinary fields it sought to displace. Many scholarly endeavors undertaken by those with training in American Studies are just as narrow and specialized as those pursued by their counterparts trained in English and history. The notion that “interdisciplinary” is equivalent to “broad” or “integrative” or “synthetic” is belied by much of the research undertaken in this area. The standards of contemporary scholarship appear to encourage a rather high degree of specialization even on the part of those who are committed to interdisciplinary scholarship.

What the American experience does say is that the efficacy in building enduring bridges between disciplines depends on many factors, including the currents percolating through adjacent disciplines, especially on the part of new entrants. Many potential connections remained relatively dormant, such as the connection between American Studies and anthropology, despite the centrality of the notion of “culture” in both domains. It is hard to see how the type of intellectual ferment represented by American Studies could be imposed from the dean’s office. Individual academic entrepreneurs can see opportunities and connections between fields, but enduring organizational transformation requires a powerful intellectual vision sufficient to secure the commitment of faculty, deans, grant-giving agencies and foundation, undergraduates and prospective graduate students to a new way of understanding the world. These transformations are often easier to accomplish within existing disciplines rather than via the creation of entirely new fields.

The case of American Studies also makes clear that the relationships between fields shift over time in response to developments on both sides of the fence. Thus, the emergence of social history as a powerful force in history departments and post-structuralism and multiculturalism in literature departments challenged the intellectual niche that American Studies had developed in contrast to the earlier currents in neighboring fields. Ironically, given the lack of control over its own departmental appointments, American Studies has depended on the presence of sympathetic scholars with appointments in history and English departments, even as the field continued to search for a distinctive approach.

American Studies as an effort to create interdisciplinary connections was followed in the 1970s by African-American Studies, Women's Studies, and subsequently by a host of other interdisciplinary endeavors. How can we understand the relationship between American Studies and these other nascent fields? Did American Studies help to create the intellectual climate for these programs? Did it serve as an organizational model that could be emulated by those that followed? Or perhaps did the effort to create these diverse programs stall the forward momentum needed for the broader institutionalization of American Studies programs? I examine the relationships among these other specialized "studies" programs. While individual scholars with expertise in African-American and Women's Studies are well represented in American Studies meetings, there appear to be a surprisingly weak organizational connections between these programs in terms of their establishment in individual colleges and universities.

This essay sketches some of the main developments in American Studies through several broad periods from the foundation of the field up to the present. In each interval, a review of the main intellectual currents is juxtaposed with trends in organization developments, including the number of programs and the number of students receiving degrees in American Studies. I show how the case of American Studies can be understood within the framework for the study of scientific developments sketched by Frickel and Gross (2005).

The intellectual profile of the field is based on articles appearing in the *American Quarterly*, a number of review articles (Spiller, 1975; Wise, 1979; Gleason, 1984; Davis, 1990; Zenderland, 2006), collections (Maddox, 1999; Krabbendam and Verheul, 1999), essays debating the appropriate direction for the field, presidential addresses delivered to the American Studies Association, and interviews with six prominent American studies scholars. Data on student enrollment and degrees conferred were obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics. Program information was compiled from a number of sources, including published reports that appeared periodically in *American Quarterly* and, in more recent years, program information obtained from the *Directory of Graduate Programs in American Studies*, and the American Studies Association website. Comparative data on American Studies, African-American Studies and Women's Studies programs since 1970 was culled from various editions of *The College Blue Book*. Data on citations to articles in the *American Quarterly* were drawn from the Thompson ISI Citation indices. Dissertation abstracts were obtained from listings published in the *American Quarterly*.

One set of issues not addressed here is how much undergraduates learn in American Studies. In Chapter 9 of *In Defense of Disciplines* (Jacobs, 2013), I was able to partially address the question of student learning for interdisciplinary programs in general, but there were not sufficient data to isolate American Studies specifically.

The Founding and Early Years of American Studies

One of the first goals of American Studies scholars was putting the study of American civilization on the intellectual map. As strange as it may seem from the contemporary vantage point, during the 1950s American literature was given short shrift by many English departments. A related critique of literary scholars was an over-emphasis (from the point of view of American studies) on scholarship geared to interpreting the accomplishments of a narrow set of canonical authors. Zenderland (2006) contrasts a view of culture that emphasized the great achievements of a small group of creators (writers, painters, composers, architects) with a broader, more anthropological view of culture. If the study of culture was synonymous with the focus on masterpieces, then America would continue to fall in Europe's shadow. The canon of literature in the English language would start with Shakespeare and the great British novelists, and only a handful of American authors would warrant inclusion. Americanists sought to make the case that the American culture was worth studying,¹ or, as Gene Wise would later write, "to free the study of American Literature from its role as an appendage to Anglo-Saxon literature (1979:304)." While later scholars would seek to go beyond the study of Hawthorne, Melville, Twain and Whitman, the task of the first generation of American studies scholars was to legitimate the study of American authors as worthy of the attention of American undergraduates.

The founders of American Studies also sought to fill intellectual niches that were left unattended by other disciplines. In this way their rationale echoed Donald Campbell's argument for interdisciplinarity. Campbell (1969) maintained that traditional disciplines leave considerable terrain unplowed, that disciplinary boundaries unduly circumscribed legitimate areas of inquiry. Interdisciplinarity, for Campbell, was a way to explore these vacant spaces, and would lead to the creation of a "fish-scale" model of "omniscience."

The arguments advancing the need for the creation of a field of American Studies were fully consistent with Campbell's approach. Advocates maintained that there were many aspects of literature that fell outside the confines of most traditional English departments, and, to a lesser extent, various aspects of cultural history that fell outside the confines of intellectual history as practiced in history departments at the time.

¹ For example, Murray Murphey told me that in the 1950s, the introductory survey course in English at the University of Pennsylvania department was a two-semester course which only got as far as the 15th century by the end of first semester. This approach to English-language literature clearly deemphasized American writers, since American literature had not begun by 1600 and American authors would have had to compete for a sliver of attention during the second semester.

This position is well articulated in Henry Nash Smith's influential essay, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" (1957). The "new criticism" perspective dominated literary studies during the 1950s. This approach was based on an intense focus on texts by themselves, and tended to leave history and biography out of the picture. Smith complained that the focus of new criticism on texts themselves was unduly limiting. "The New Criticism has made it extraordinarily difficult to relate literature to the culture within which it occurs and which it is indisputably a part (1957: 202)." Those interested in viewing literature in a broader cultural and historical context were among those drawn to American Studies.

On the history side of the ledger, the complaints were generally less pointed and specific, perhaps because intellectual terrain was somewhat different. While there was no shortage of courses devoted to American history, Americanists complained that too much historical scholarship was antiquarian and the discipline overly rigid (McDowell, 1948). American Studies scholars held that traditional history departments focused on a limited set of political tropes, from the biographies of presidents to military conflicts, and left out a great deal of American intellectual, cultural and material history. The goal was not to do more "intellectual history" or "literary history" but to use the ideas and literature of the time to inform the understanding of American culture in a more synthetic or holistic manner (Spiller, 1973; Tate, 1973).

The founders of American Studies sought to advance the cause of a general liberal education in addition to filling the intellectual gaps between literature and history. The American Studies manifesto penned in 1948 by Tremaine McDowell of the University of Minnesota actually devotes slightly more space to the theme of general education than it does to the field of American Studies *per se*. A number of accounts of the rise of the field point to the congruence between American Studies and the broader movement toward general education (for example, see Walker, 1958; Spiller, 1975).

In addition to these intellectual currents, the end of World War II and the start of the cold war gave additional impetus to the pursuit of a more unified exploration of American culture. The twin challenges of fascism and communism led many scholars to rise to the defense of freedom and democracy (Gleason, 1984). Given the prominence of democracy in the founding documents of the United States, it was a short step from the promotion of democracy in general to the celebration of American culture as a cradle and bastion of democratic ideals. This theme was linked to the notion of American exceptionalism and to national character studies (Zenderland, 2006).

During the 1950s, the relatively scant attention to America as a civilization worthy of study seemed incongruous given the rise of the United States as a world power. In outlining the context for the creation of American Studies programs in foreign countries, Robert Spiller wrote that "At the end of World War II, the United States suddenly found itself to be the major political and economic power of the west, whereas its culture had as yet almost no part in the curricula of most European countries (1975, pp. 4-5)."

The cold war also helped to provide financial as well as intellectual impetus for American Studies. The Carnegie Corporation, the Rockefeller Foundation and other foundations provided funding for American Studies programs (Davis, 1990; Wise, 1979). U. S. government funding played a particularly key role in the promotion of American Studies programs in countries around the world. (Davis, 1990; Walker, 1975; Rupp, 1999). Government support was available for international conferences on American Studies, and Fulbright grants facilitated the study in U. S. of international scholars while also promoting study abroad by American academics (Spiller, 1975, p 6).

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the “myth and symbol” approach emerged as emblematic of American Studies scholarship. Among the exemplars of this approach were Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927), Perry Miller, *The New England Mind* (1953), and Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land* (1950). These scholars sought to identify currents in American intellectual and popular thought. The goal was to identify a unified conception of “the American Mind” as embodied in the writing of prominent authors or in the landmarks such as the Brooklyn Bridge.

The goal of American Studies scholars during the 1950s was to pursue a more integrated approach to culture. The reference point here was culture in the sense used by some of the leading cultural anthropologists, including Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Franz Boas and other (see Janssens, 1999 and Zenderland, 2006). It is ironic, then, that anthropologists played a relatively small role in American Studies and anthropological methods remained relatively unusual for American Studies scholars. Despite the active involvement of Margaret Mead in the early years of the *American Quarterly*, anthropologists remained scarce in the ranks of American Studies scholars. I will consider this missed opportunity below when I discuss the relatively small part that the social sciences played in American Studies.

By the end of the 1930s, American Studies programs were ensconced at several prominent research Universities (Chicago, Harvard, and Penn), and a smattering of liberal arts colleges, including Amherst and Smith. By the end of the 1940s, Yale and Minnesota had established programs as well, and McDowell could report that “more than sixty institutions offered the B. A. degree in American civilization, and approximately fifteen offered the M. A. degree or the Ph.D. degree or both.” (McDowell, 1948:26). While most programs were named American Studies, some (including Harvard and Penn), adopted the more impressive moniker of “American Civilization.” The issue of what name fit best continued to be debated into the 1990s (Radway, 1999).²

The number of programs continued to expand gradually through the end of the 1960s. By 1957, a survey found 72 American Studies programs, a figure which grew to 150 by 1968 (Walker, 1958). During this period, college enrollment soared due to higher

² During the 1970s, *The College Blue Book* reported American Civilization and American Studies programs separately. The popularity of the American Civilization label declined sharply during the 1970s, with the number of programs featuring this title declining from 89 in 1970 to 20 in 1979. By 1985, the Blue Book no longer separated American Civilization from other American Studies programs. With the increasingly critical stance that Americanists were taking to American culture, perhaps the term “studies” seemed more neutral and the term “civilization” seemed too grandiose to fit the times.

rates of college attendance and the growing cohorts of baby boomers. This expansionary environment nourished the spread of American Studies programs.

However, it should be noted that during this founding period, American Studies typically took the hybrid form of a cross-departmental program rather than as a stand-alone department. Borrowing professors from history and English departments made sense initially since no one had been trained in an American Studies department. But the next step, transforming programs into departments, was not taken at most schools. If we take as a measure of institutionalization in research universities the establishment of a separate academic department which offers undergraduate, master's and doctoral degrees in a field, then relatively few American Studies departments became fully institutionalized.

The first volume of the journal, *American Quarterly*, was published in 1949. After being edited for its first year at the University of Minnesota, which featured one of the more active American Studies programs, the journal moved to the University of Pennsylvania where it remained until the end of the 1980s. The American Studies Association (ASA) was established in 1951, several years after the creation of the journal, and it too found an organizational home at Penn.

Davis (1990) notes that American Studies was slow in organizing a national meeting. During the 1950s and 1960s the model was regional meetings combined with American Studies sessions sponsored at the national meetings of the American History Association and the Modern Languages Association. Davis suggests that this pattern followed the model of the Association of College Teachers of English which was a federation of regional chapters. The first national meeting was not held until 1967.

American Studies as a Scientific/Intellectual Movement

To become a defined field of inquiry, intellectual advances require more than a solitary scholar with a brilliant insight. Scott Frickel and Neil Gross (2005) introduced the term "Scientific/ Intellectual Movement," or SIM for short, to describe the intellectual and social processes involved in the development of new intellectual fields and subfields. Frickel and Gross suggest that the development of a new field, like the establishment of the discipline of psychology, or a subfield, such as "the status attainment model" in sociology, is analogous to the development of a social or political movement, like the civil rights or women's movements. In both cases, success depends on compelling ideas, sufficient financial and social resources, and effective organizational structures. Opportunities in the intellectual and social landscape are also indispensable.

Frickel and Gross suggest that new ideas are more likely to find a receptive audience when they resonate with established ideas. For example, as the founders of American Studies sought to develop a more unified conception of American culture, they latched onto anthropological conceptions of culture that were already available.

SIMs also benefit from social as well as economic resources. For example, Frickel and Gross note that new fields are more likely to emerge when high status actors "harbor complaints against what they understand to be the central intellectual

tendencies of the day (2005:209).” Advocates for a new field benefit from financial support needed to host conferences, edit newsletters and journals, and establish regional and national organizations. Key resources in the academic realm are research grants, fellowships and especially tenured faculty positions.

American Studies benefited from the emergence of prominent intellectual leaders like Perry Miller at Harvard. The presence of American Studies at leading institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Penn and Minnesota helped to legitimize American Studies as a distinct field of inquiry. By sponsoring these prominent programs, the Carnegie Foundation could foster the development of American Studies as an enterprise, with the hope of seeing these successful examples replicated at other colleges and institutions. Thus, as the American Studies model was adopted in dozens of institutions which did not receive foundation support, the impact of the original investment multiplied substantially.

Wise (1979) repeatedly refers to “our movement” in terms that fit neatly within Frickel and Gross’s framework. While Wise’s essay is organized around the contribution of several scholars, he nonetheless details many of the elements of successful SIMs that Frickel and Gross outline: the role of large foundation grants in supporting the staff of the American Studies Association, the key infrastructure contributions of Robert Spiller and others, and the tight network of scholars who ultimately elaborated the “myth and symbol” paradigm.

1960s and 1970s: Transformation

In 1965, the field of American Studies remained ascendant. Two notable books had just been published: Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), and Alan Trachtenberg’s *Brooklyn Bridge* (1965). The journal, the *American Quarterly*, was well established. The number of American Studies programs continued to expand in the U. S. and internationally. The first national meeting of the American Studies Association in the U. S. was still two years away.

The institutionalization of American Studies at this point should not be overstated. There were fewer than 150 such programs across the country, and most of these were interdisciplinary programs rather than self-contained departments. This meant that American Studies depended on the availability of sympathetic faculty tenured in traditional departments to staff courses. This was often a challenging proposition given the needs in faculty members’ home departments. Moreover, debates over whether American Studies was a distinctive field with a distinctive method or a multi-disciplinary collection of scholars with broadly similar interests remained unresolved. And American Studies scholars continued to debate the role of the social sciences in the field. These arguments aroused passionate opinions on all sides but did not dampen the spirit of optimism about the American Studies project.

The political and intellectual climate, however, was about to shift. The Vietnam War shattered the consensus view of American history and American culture. A new generation of scholars entered the academy with new assumptions and passions. The

“myth and symbol” approach so often associated with American Studies scholarship had begun to lose its ability to guide new research. Opposition to the war along with a broader concern with what some saw as America’s imperial role in international affairs burst into the corridors of the national meetings of the American Studies Association along with an interest in the experiences of minorities and women in American society and culture. In a short period of time, a new generation of scholars turned the presuppositions of the field on its head (Wise, 1979; Davis, 1990; Zenderland, 2006).

Academic revolutions, however, can take decades to work through the system. Given the long time frames for academic careers, the developments of the late 1960s were not fully felt until the 1980s and 1990s. The struggles of graduate students and some younger faculty members under the banner of the “radical caucus” at the 1969 meeting of the American Studies Association (Sklar, 1970) echo in the pages of ASA presidential addresses of the 1990s and 2000s (Davis, 1990; Washington, 1998; Kaplan, 2004). As we will see, the organizational development of American Studies continued on an upward trajectory for another two decades even as enrollments peaked and then declined.

The 1970s and early 1980s represented a transition period in several ways for American Studies. Intellectually, as the myth and symbol approach from the 1950s began to ebb, scholarship focused on a diverse array of more specialized topics. This period represented a halfway point between the unified notion of culture from the 1950s and the more segmented focus on diversity in the American experience reflected in the emphasis on multiculturalism that would subsequently come to dominate American Studies. In organizational terms, the trends were paradoxical: studies programs continued to expand in numbers even in the face of sharp declines in undergraduate enrollments.

Bruce Kuklick (1972) offered a trenchant critique of the myth and symbol approach to American Studies. Operating with philosophical precision, he questioned the connection between popular literature and ordinary life, as well as the assumption that a fixed conceptual schema identified by an author has had enduring influence on behavior throughout American history. But force of this approach had already lost its grip on the imagination of doctoral students by the time that Kuklick’s essay was published.

While American studies scholars continued to endeavor to bridge the divide between literature and history, during the 1970s they also sought to shed light on a diverse array of topics that were not considered sufficiently mainstream or legitimate in the traditional disciplines. Special issues of the *American Quarterly* illustrate this pattern. Several issues were devoted to topics that would not have been out of place in more traditional journals: “Victorian Culture in America” (Winter, 1975) and “The American Enlightenment” (Summer, 1976).

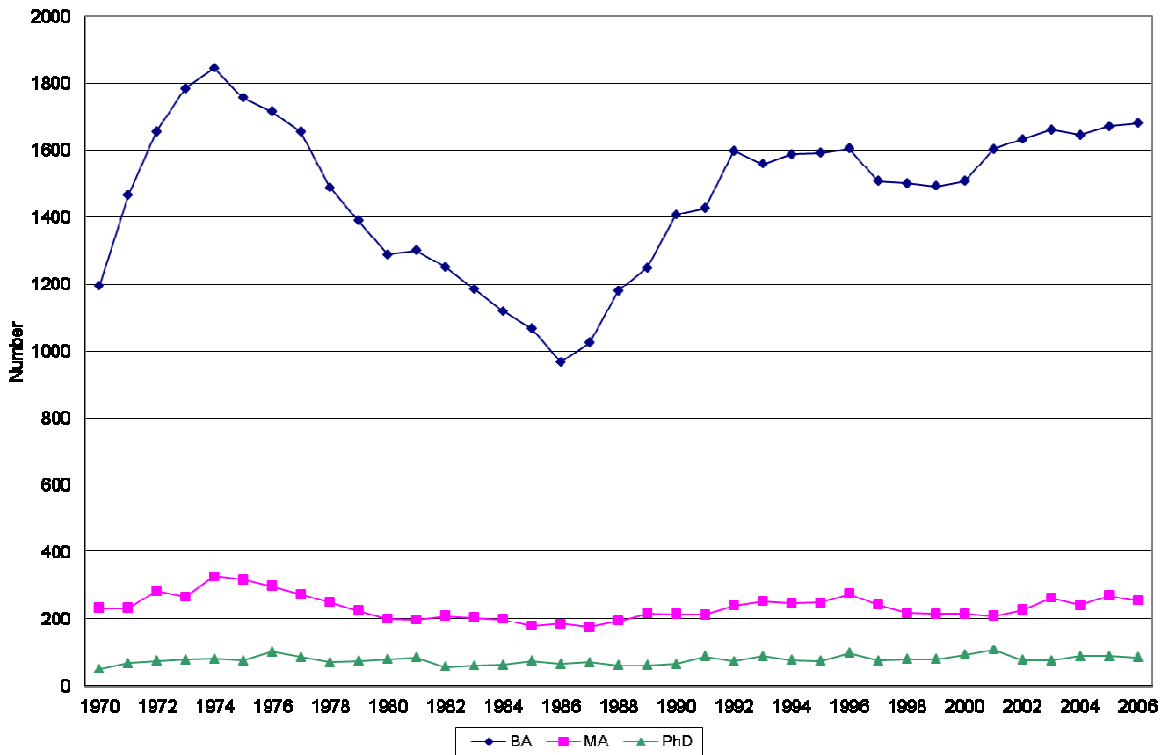
The topics of other special issues, however, might well have had a harder time finding a comfortable home in either history or English journals. For example, American Studies scholars sought to add film to the list of topics worthy of serious study as a prominent element in American culture. The special issue of the *American Quarterly*,

“Film and American Studies” (Winter,1979) represents just one example of a growing trend toward the study of cultural objects or institutions that did not fit neatly within the confines of the traditional disciplines. Films were not “texts” in the literal sense, nor had they been considered topics for “serious” historians. The study of film caught on, and at the 2008 American Studies Association meetings, no less than 24 sessions were devoted to film. Similarly, the special issues on death (Winter, 1974) and humor (Spring, 1985) gave a priority to themes that had not been treated as such by traditional focus on individual authors in literature or focus on political history in history departments.

Under Bruce Kuklick’s editorship (from 1974 through 1982), the *American Quarterly* did not embrace the radical turn of the new generation of American Studies students. The post-structuralist approach to literature and the focus on multiculturalism in American history began to percolate through graduate students reading lists and dissertations but would not become common in the journal until the 1980s and 1990s.

The intellectual currents in the 1970s remained vibrant, even if they represented a departure in significant ways from the vision of the most prominent early figures in American Studies. Trends in the social organization of American Studies during this period, however, were mixed. After steady growth during the 1950s and 1960s, the absolute number of students earning bachelor’s degrees in American studies peaked in 1974 at 1,844. American studies graduates fell in number to 967 in 1986 (See Figure 1. The Figures and Tables can be found at the end of this paper). As a share of undergraduate degree

Figure 1. Trends In American Studies Degrees, 1970-2006



recipients, American Studies peaked in 1974 at just under two-tenths of one percent of degrees conferred in U. S. colleges and universities (see Figure 2).³

Ironically, programs continued a steady increase in numbers during the 1970s. The number of American Studies programs increased from 219 in 1974 to 302 in 1984; and the number of programs offering masters nearly doubled during this period (from 32 to 60), although the number of programs offering doctoral degrees remained steady at about thirty (see Figure 3).

Was the decline in American Studies degrees awarded due to the growth in popularity of Women's Studies and African-American Studies? While individual courses in these areas were no doubt popular, these programs were often fledgling operations too small to siphon off large numbers of degree recipients.⁴

The enrollment trends for American Studies were due in part to the stagnation in overall college enrollments. The baby boom cohort of 1960s was giving way to the baby bust of the 1980s. The number of bachelor's degrees awarded in U. S. college colleges and universities peaked at 650,000 in 1974 and did not surpass this level until 1985. A decline in enrollments of men from an inflated Vietnam-era level (when young men enrolled in

³ All degree and enrollment data were obtained from the Digest of Education Statistics (National Center for Education Statistics). American Studies degrees were not reported separately before 1970.

⁴ According to my analysis of program trends in *The College Blue Book*, relatively few schools offered bachelor's degrees in Women's Studies until end of 1970s. Moreover, there was relatively little overlap between schools with African-American Studies programs and American Studies programs during this period.

Figure 2. American Studies Degrees, as Percentage of Degree Recipients

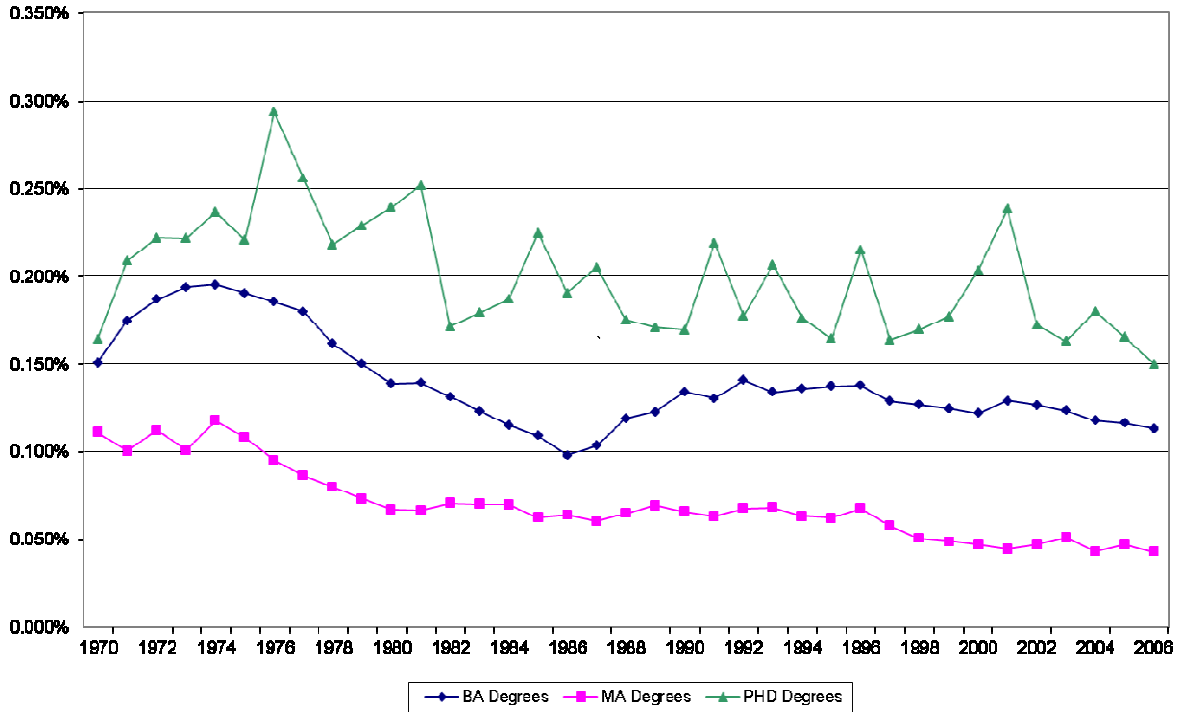
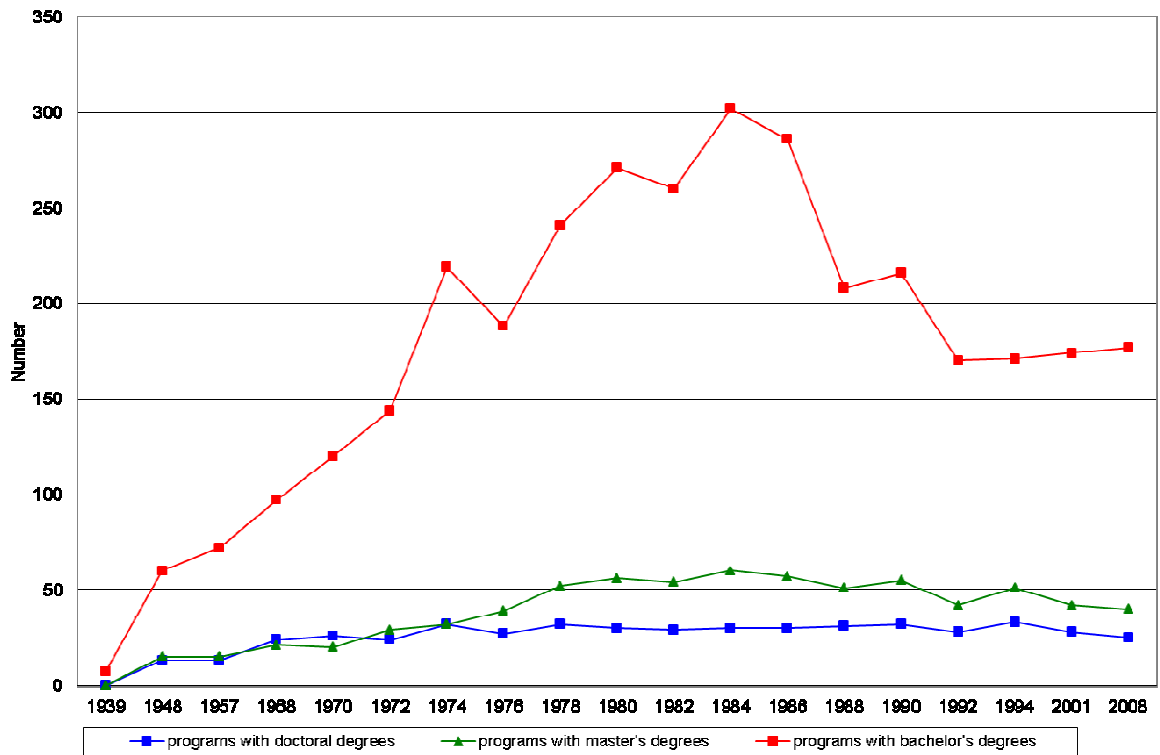


Figure 3. Trends in American Studies Programs



college to avoid the military draft) was roughly offset by an increase in the enrollment of women, who matched men in the receipt of bachelor's degrees for the first time in 1982. The burgeoning ranks of women students should have helped to keep American Studies classrooms full, since women have been disproportionately represented among students in the humanities.

The decline in American studies enrollments during this period, however, was primarily due to a broader shift of students away from the humanities. In this way, the small field of American Studies was caught up a downdraft that enveloped even the larger and more established disciplines of English and history. Degrees awarded in English declined by half and those in history by over 60 percent between 1971 and 1984. The decline in American studies degrees reflected this trend (National Center for Education Statistics; Geiger, 2006).

The loss of students from American Studies was not to nascent fields such as Women's Studies and African-American Studies as much as they were to applied fields such as business, which doubled in degrees conferred between 1971 and 1984. The shift away from the humanities during this period reflected undergraduates' concerns about getting a good job following graduation. Economist Richard Freeman (1976) showed that the economic benefit to college enrollment narrowed during this period as the economy had difficulty absorbing the large number of recent college graduates.

This shift also reflected the growing materialism of undergraduates documented in large surveys of undergraduates. The proportion of freshman who reported that being "very well-off financially" was very important to them increased from 54.4 percent in 1974 to 75.6 percent in 1984. At the same time, developing a "meaningful philosophy of life" declined from 57.4 percent in 1974 to 44.0 percent in 1984 (Astin, Green and Korn, 1987). This shift in values probably contributed to the decline in enrollments in the humanities.

How did American Studies programs continue to expand in number in the face of declining enrollments? It should be noted that the number of programs awarding doctoral degrees did not grow. Rather, programs continued to proliferate in smaller, liberal-arts institutions that awarded only bachelor's degrees. This growth can be understood in terms of its modest cost on dean's budgets. After all, the creation of an American Studies program did not mean an extra commitment of faculty positions or significant resources. These programs typically grew in smaller liberal arts colleges where the allegiance of faculty to disciplinary paradigms was often weaker than at larger institutions, and where opportunities to collaborate with colleagues were viewed as an opportunity rather than a burden. As we will see, the small size of many of these programs would later make them vulnerable.

1980s to the 2000s

By the late 1980s and certainly during the 1990s, the alternative approach to American Studies that emerged in response to the Vietnam War came to fruition. This may seem

like a long delay, but several factors need to be taken into account. In the humanities, taking seven or more years to complete a Ph.D. is quite common, and thus there is a lag between events and when the faculty inspired by those events rise to positions of seniority. Moreover, American academia in the late 1970s experienced a drought in hiring, especially in the humanities, and this also contributed to the delay.

Evidence of the prevalence of gender and other forms of diversity in American Studies research is not hard to find in this period. In 1988, the theme of the national meeting was "The Intersection of Race, Class, Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture." ASA President Linda Kerber delivered her Presidential Address entitled "Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies." (Kerber, 1989). In 1993, a special issue of the *American Quarterly* was devoted to the topic of multiculturalism. By the 1990s multiculturalism had become established as a powerful force in American Studies scholarship. The search for a method for American Studies preoccupied scholars for decades, but by the 1990s American Studies scholars were more likely to complain about the need for more attention to diversity and to global concerns than they were to search for a unifying method.

Just how prominent multiculturalism became is apparent from a content analysis of dissertation abstracts in American Studies. In 1990, 30 percent of dissertations in American Studies included some specific consideration of race or gender in the abstract (specifically, 21 percent addressed gender issues and 9 percent race, while none included both). By 2000, race and gender issues had become even more prominent, with 62 percent of dissertations mentioning either race or gender (45 percent of dissertations mentioned race, 31 percent gender, and 14 percent both) (Doctoral Dissertations in American Studies, 1989-90; Dissertation Abstracts, 1999-2000).

In addition to multiculturalism, the other major intellectual current was the rise of post-structuralism. Here again, the roots date back to the 1970s but did not fully flourish until the 1980s and 1990s. The French theorists Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault among others sought to question the meaning imputed to canonical texts, and more generally to deconstruct authoritative interpretations of literature. This tendency represented something quite different from the 1950s goal of putting the literature back in its cultural context. The post-structuralist movement was powerful not only in American Studies but in many literary fields represented in the Modern Language Association.

This approach to literature drew its share of critics, both internal and external. For example, Steven Watts, in his Presidential Address to the Mid-American American Studies Association in 1989, decried the "idiocy" of American Studies. In addition to concerns over post-structuralism as a way of approaching literature, Watt's objections centered on the concern that it was difficult to use this approach to make sense of large periods of American history (Watts, 1991; Shank, 1992).

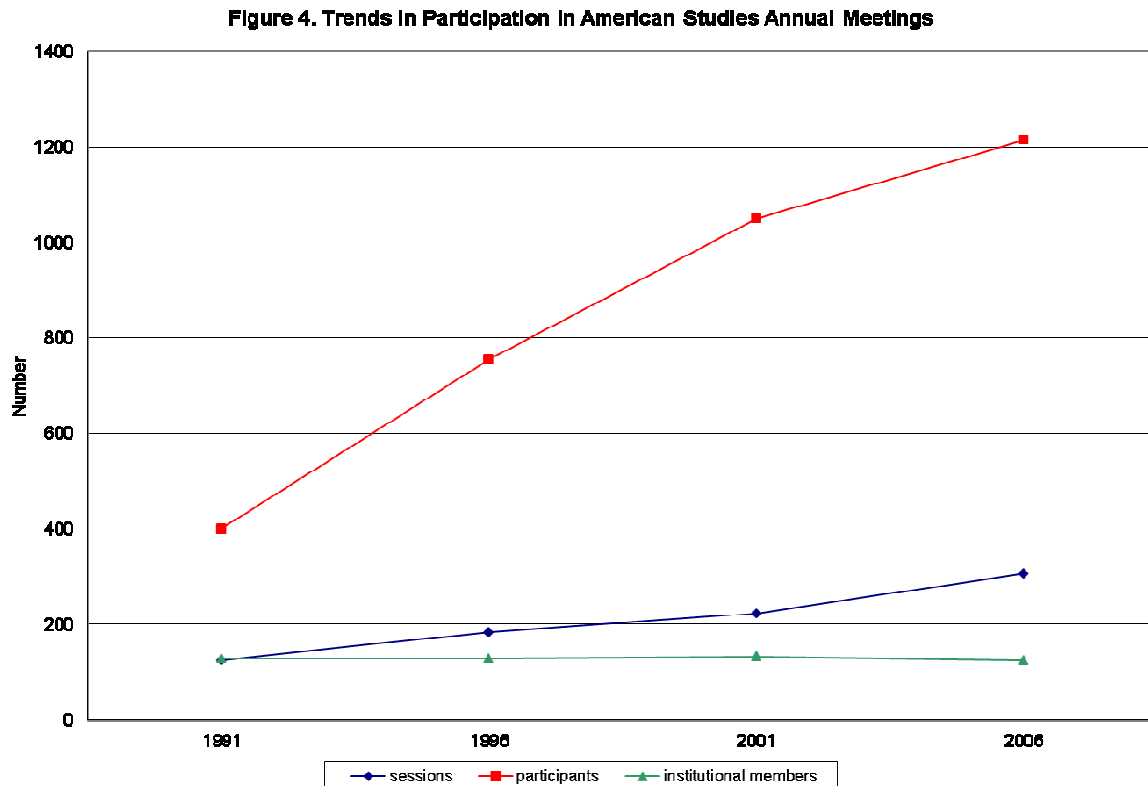
American Studies dissertations often focus on specialized areas of research, as in "Landscape as Palimpsest: The Fugitive Images of Southeastern Colorado" and "Wards of the Nation: The Making of St. Elizabeth's Hospital, 1852-1920." While some endeavor to tackle somewhat broader themes, such as "Craven Images: Cowardice in American

Literature from the Revolutionary to the Nuclear Era," it is fair to say that few if any in recent years seek to paint with as broad a brush as the authors of *The New England Mind* or *Virgin Land*.

This period also saw the increasing prominence of global themes in American Studies' scholarship. Where American Civilization scholars of the early 1950s sought to underscore the America's distinctive commitment to liberal democracy, by the turn of the century American studies scholars were writing more critically of America's role as an imperial power (Kaplan, 2004). While the very title "American Studies" would seem to draw clear geographic boundaries around the subject matter, American Studies scholars of this period sought to understand the global impact of American culture as well as international cultural transmission to the U. S. via immigration and other sources. Indeed, Rowe (2002) insists that comparative analysis has become a central feature of the American Studies project.

The transformation of the intellectual preoccupations of American Studies coincided with the decline in influence of the elite institutions. The *American Quarterly* had been edited at the University of Pennsylvania from 1950 through 1987. In 1988, the journal moved to the Smithsonian Institution under the editorship of Gary Kulik, before it moved again in 1994 to Georgetown University, where Lucy Maddox served as editor for a decade. The presidents of the ASA had diverse backgrounds, representing a broad range of institutions. After Lois Banner served as the first female ASA President from 1986-1987, ten of the next twelve ASA presidents were women. The late 1990s and 2000s saw a series of African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American scholars elected president, (Mary Helen Washington, George Sanchez and Stephen Sumida), following only the noted African-American historian John Hope Franklin, who had served as ASA President in 1967.

National meetings of the American Studies Association began in 1967, were biennial through 1987 and have been held annually since then. The national ASA meetings have thrived since the decision to switch to an annual meeting. The number of program participants roughly tripled between 1991 and 2006, although the number of institutional members has been essentially unchanged (see Figure 4). For example, the 2008 meeting held in Albuquerque featured approximately 1,200 presenters in more than 250 sessions spanning four days, plus dozens of business meetings and receptions.



Funding for national scholarly organizations such as the American Studies Association begins with a base of journal subscriptions and membership dues. The *American Quarterly* has over 2,000 library subscriptions which provide a reliable base of funds for the organization.

Other organizational trends, however, were not as positive. The receipt of bachelor's degrees in American Studies finally bottomed out during the 1980s and began a modest rebound. The number of bachelor's degree recipients dipped slightly under 1,000 in 1986 and climbed back toward 1,700 by 2006 along with other fields in the humanities. However, this figure has yet to surpass the high water mark of 1,844 reached in 1974. The growth since the early 1990s has been due to the growing population of college students. In other words, American Studies share of all bachelor's degrees received has been declining since the early 1990s and is substantially below the level seen during the 1970s.

While enrollments have rebounded from their low point during the mid-1980s, American Studies programs have declined in number and have not recouped these losses. Estimates based on program counts from the *American Quarterly* and reports from the American Studies Association indicate that roughly one third of programs that were in operation during the early 1980s are no longer active. Most of this decline occurred during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Pinpointing program closures with complete precision is not possible, since there was not perfectly consistency from year to year in program counts. In particular, in some years, those administering the program surveys may have been stricter than in other years in removing non-responding schools

from the list. Nonetheless, it seems clear that the number of American Studies programs peaked during the early 1980s at about 300 programs, and declined by the early 1990s to under 200 programs, a level that has remained roughly constant since that time.⁵

American Studies has endured for over sixty years, although many of today's prominent themes would surprise and perhaps disappoint its founders. But before trying to say more about the intellectual trajectory of American Studies, let us turn to a more sustained consideration of the organizational dimensions of American Studies. How successful has American Studies been in organizational terms? And how is American Studies scholarship situated in the broader array of academic fields? This discussion will include not only its closest neighbors, history and English, but also the social sciences and other the interdisciplinary programs such as African-American and Women's Studies.

Organizational Strengths and Weaknesses

Most reviews of American Studies naturally focus on the intellectual trajectory of the field and largely take the organizational structure for granted. What does American Studies look like viewed from an organization lens rather than a close reading of the field's paradigmatic texts? As we have seen, the current picture is mixed. On the one hand, American Studies has a thriving and secure national organization with well-attended national meetings. It has developed a wide international scope with presence in some 50 countries. On the other hand, in the United States, American Studies awards degrees to only the smallest sliver of students and has secured departmental status in only a handful of universities.

As of 2008, American Studies has not succeeded in becoming an academic department in most institutions of higher education in the United States. This review has identified only ten universities with graduate departments in American Studies. Moreover, of the ten American Studies departments, only seven of these offer a Ph.D. degree.⁶ Since academic departments continue to represent a basic unit of American higher education, especially in terms of control over hiring decisions, the extremely limited number of American Studies programs that have attained the status of academic departments must be taken as a central indication of the failure of American Studies as a scientific/intellectual movement to achieve a universal degree of institutional acceptance.

In 2008, a total of 40 colleges and universities offered a master's degree in American Studies, while 25 offered a PhD. These academic programs typically do not have

⁵ The ASA website in 2009 listed 179 programs including a number of African-American and ethnic studies programs, while *The College Blue Book* lists 247 schools offering a bachelor's degree in American studies in 2007.

⁶ Data on departments and programs were obtained from the website of the American Studies Association, Directory of Graduate Programs in American Studies, 2008. http://www.theasa.net/publications/grad_programs/page/directory_of_graduate_programs

dedicated faculty positions and are dependent on appointments from established departments in the humanities and occasionally the social sciences.

In only six universities (Brown, Hawaii, Indiana, Minnesota, New Mexico and Texas) are American Studies Departments fully established, that is, with their own faculty lines and ability to offer a doctoral degree.⁷ These departments averaged just over ten core faculty members. This level of institutionalization must be judged to be quite low given that there are over 2,500 four year colleges and universities in United States. Even if we take the 250 PhD granting institutions as the relevant universe, American Studies is represented in only about 10 percent of these institutions. Thus, of universities with doctoral programs, about one in ten offer a doctoral degree in American Studies while 200/2,500 or less than one undergraduate institution out of ten has an American Studies program.

As we have seen, in terms of undergraduate enrollment, American Studies has attracted only a tiny fraction of students. Currently just over one-tenth of one percent of undergraduates major in American Studies, and less than one-twentieth of one percent of master's students (see Figure 2 above). These data on majors raise questions about the argument that undergraduates are drawn to inter-disciplinary fields of study. Perhaps they are, but not enough to overcome the greater legitimacy accorded to established disciplines such as history and English, not to mention more potentially lucrative fields such as business and computer science.

In terms of Phds, American Studies doctorates topped 100 per year only twice, in 1976 and 2001 (See Figure 1). The number of new PhDs in American Studies has averaged 76 since 1970, representing just under two-tenths of one percent of new Phds. Another way to understand the relatively small size of American Studies as a field is to compare it to its two principal neighbors, history and English. In 2006, there were nearly 10 times as many doctoral degrees granted in history as in American Studies, and nearly 15 times as many doctoral degrees in English.

If there are fewer than one dozen American Studies departments with control over faculty hiring, many of which would not need any new faculty in a given year, there would seem to be a mismatch between degree production and hiring potential. Why would anyone spend six or more years pursuing a doctoral degree in a field which has so few openings? What becomes of American Studies graduates?

During the late 1990s and early 2000s the ASA surveyed recent graduates of American Studies PhD programs (ASA Survey of Doctoral Recipients in American Studies, various years). While sizable fractions reported that they desired tenure-track positions in American Studies programs, a much smaller fraction reported realizing this goal. About one in five of those American Studies doctorates responding to the ASA

⁷ These totals focus on American Studies *per se* and do not include African-American Studies, Women's Studies, Chicano Studies or Liberal Studies. They also do not include programs that offer a certificate in American Studies along with PhD in English or History, and do not include programs with "minor" concentrations in American Studies as part of a PhD in other subject fields.

surveys reported employment in American Studies. History, English and “other field” were each more likely destinations than was American Studies.⁸

A final aspect of the organization picture of American Studies must be added, namely the international dimension. American Studies is not solely the province of academics based in the U. S. From an international perspective, America is a topic of considerable interest. Given the worldwide influence of America since World War II, it is not surprising that observers in many countries are anxious to understand American history, culture and politics. As a result, American Studies programs are active in quite a number of countries. By 2008, the American Studies Association website listed 32 journals in 21 countries outside the U. S., including journals from Brazil, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Poland, Scandinavia, South Africa, Taiwan, and Turkey.⁹ This list probably focuses on the countries with the most active programs, since maintaining a journal represents a considerable amount of effort and requires a critical mass of scholars. The ASA website notes that there are “nearly fifty” American Studies associations around the world which sponsor conferences and publications. American Studies may be thought of as a kind of “area study” localized to a single country (See Stevens and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, 2008, for a discussion of area-studies programs).

Just as other countries have a natural interest in understanding the United States, the U. S. government has sought to promote a favorable understanding of the U. S. American Studies in foreign countries is often supported by funds from the U. S. government. While the main vehicle for this has been the Fulbright Program, there has also been direct support for American Studies programs. For example, the Institute of International Education is a non-profit organization that supports American Studies programs in countries around the world. U. S. Information Agency and the U. S. Department of Education support American Studies programs. Rupp (1999) views U. S. government support for American Studies programs in foreign countries as a form of “cultural diplomacy.”

Program Durability

In addition to the lack of control over hiring, among the chief worries of those who run interdisciplinary (ID) programs is that the program will be eliminated by the next dean or the next financial tsunami. As a practical matter, how much do directors of American Studies programs have to worry about?

⁸ While these data are informative regarding the destinations of American Studies Phds, the ASA surveys are probably not an appropriate resource for estimating the academic employment rate of recent graduates, since some who were not currently employed in academia might go on to secure a position at a later date, not to mention the question of how to handle non-responses.

⁹ This list does not include three other journals that focus on transatlantic studies or similar configurations of research in which American Studies plays a prominent role.

The rate of survival of American Studies programs depends on the type of program and the size of college or university in which it is located. The most deeply rooted, and most enduring, have been PhD programs located at major research universities, while the most vulnerable have been programs located in smaller, liberal-arts colleges which offered no degrees in American studies.

While several programs offering PhDs in American Studies have closed over the years, the survival rate is actually quite high. Just limiting the pool to those programs which granted PhDs, the 38 year survival rate (1970-2008) is 75 percent. In other words, of the 24 PhD American Studies programs in existence in 1970, 18 remained in operation in 2008. This works out to a 10-year survival rate of 93 percent. Of the 26 American Studies programs offering PhDs in 2008, 21 had been in operation since 1974 and 22 since 1978, so 85 percent were at least 30 years old. While it is obviously easier to terminate a program than it is to close a department, in fact this particular subset of interdisciplinary programs has proven to be quite durable.

Table 1 list the schools with American Studies programs that enduring the 1970 through 2008 period. (The University at Buffalo, formerly SUNY Buffalo, is included despite a hiatus.) Programs established after 1970 that were in operation in 2008 are listed next, with their approximate start dates), followed by programs that were in existence in 1970 but did not survive through 2008.¹⁰

Programs located in smaller institutions appear to be somewhat less durable. Between 1970 and 1980, in a period of dramatic growth in the number of programs, approximately 15 percent of American Studies programs closed. Most of the programs that closed were located in small colleges rather than large universities.¹¹

The survival rate of programs that offered a bachelor's degree in American Studies has appear to be about roughly comparable to that of PhD programs. These data (see Figure 5) suggest about a 10 percent decline in the number of schools offering bachelor's

¹⁰ Several long-standing programs are not included in this list, including the University of California at Irvine and Cornell University, because they were established after 1970 and did not survive through 2008. Also excluded are programs like those at Oklahoma State University which offers a concentration in American Studies as part of a PhD program in English. Other PhD programs with minors or certificates are also not included.

¹¹ Despite great efforts at survey consistency, especially from the late 1960s through the 1980s when the surveys were administered at the University of Pennsylvania, there are notable jumps in the number of programs at some points in time which likely reflects how the survey was administered. For example, in some years, the sample frame was expanded to include new schools, while in other years, only existing programs were surveyed. In some years, the count included non-responses, ie schools that had not responded to the survey, and in some years non-responders were jettisoned from the list. The surveys of programs were conducted every year during the 1970s and every other year during the 1980s. *The College Blue Book* data largely avoid these challenges, although they are limited to programs which offer some type of formal degree.

degrees in American Studies during the late 1980s and 1990s, after which there has been a rebound during the 2000s.¹²

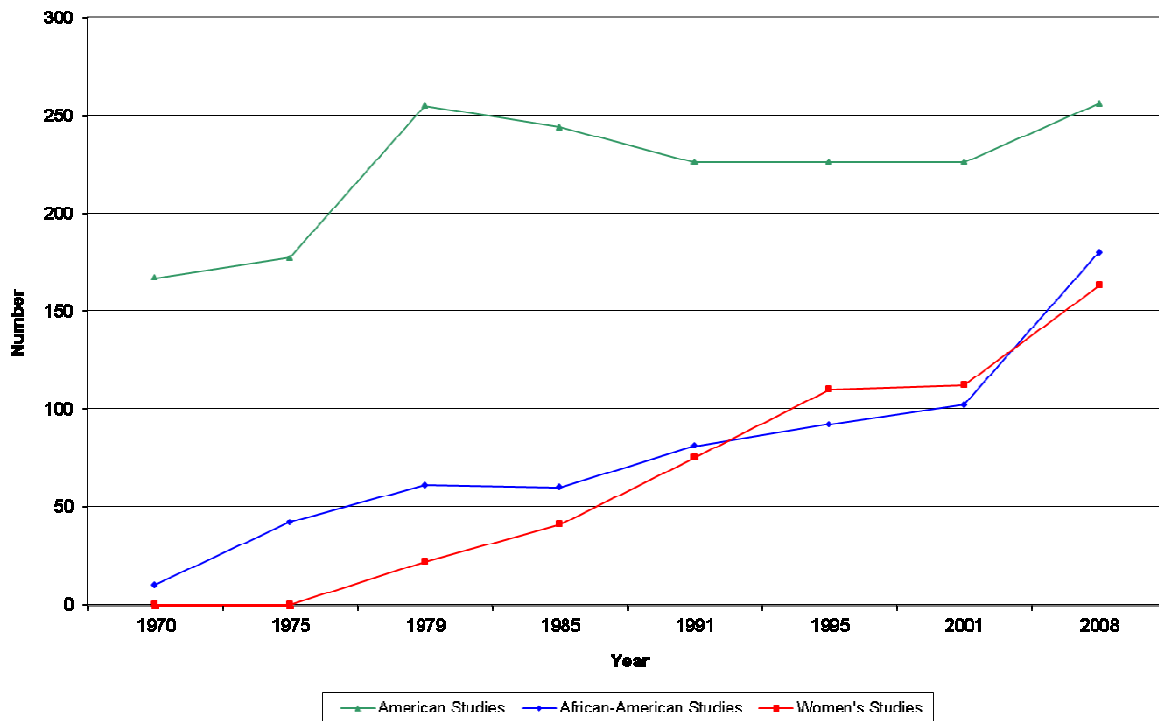
As we have seen, a substantial number – perhaps about one-third – of American Studies programs were closed during the late 1980s. These programs often did not offer a degree and were located in smaller institutions, typically liberal-arts colleges. This episode reflected a long drought in humanities hiring. In other words, short-handed faculty could only be stretched in so many directions for so long. In a way, this period of decline represented a delayed reaction to trends in enrollments and hiring that had been in place since the early 1970s. However, these closures were premature, or ironic, in that humanities enrollments began to climb again in the late 1980s just as these programs were beginning to shut their doors. This increase clearly would have been somewhat greater had not so many American Studies programs closed their doors during this period.

Table 1. PhD Programs in American Studies, 1970-2008	
In Continuous Operation, 1970-2008	Phd Programs, operating in 2008
	formed since 1970
Boston University	
Brown University	Bowling Green University, 1974
Buffalo, U. of (formerly SUNY Buffalo)	Claremont University, 2000
Emory University	Florida State, 1974
George Washington University	Iowa, U. of, 1978
Harvard University	Kent State University, 2008
Hawaii, U. of	New Mexico, U. of 1974
Indiana University	Utah, U. of, 1974
Kansas, U. of	William and Mary, 2000
Maryland, U. of	
Michigan, U. of.	Terminated:
Michigan State University	
Minnesota, U. of	Case Western University, 2000s
New York University	Georgia, U. of, 1990s
Purdue University	Iowa State U., 1974.
Texas, U. of	Pennsylvania, U. of, 1990s
Washington State University	St. Louis University, 1990s
Yale University	Syracuse University, 1990s

¹² These counts do not include schools where there is only an ethnic studies program or an African American studies program. For example, the University of California at Chico has an American Studies program as well as a Multi-cultural and Gender Studies Program, while California State University at Fresno offers an Asian Studies program but no stand-alone American Studies program. My count includes one program Chico and none at Fresno, while others may consider there to be three programs at these two schools.

Phd Programs, operating in 2008, formed since 1970	
Bowling Green University, 1974	
Claremont University, 2000	
Florida State, 1974	
Iowa, U. of, 1978	
Kent State University, 2008	
New Mexico, U. of 1974	
Utah, U. of, 1974	
William and Mary, 2000	
Terminated:	
Case Western University, 2000s	
Georgia, U. of, 1990s	
Iowa State U., 1974.	
Pennsylvania, U. of, 1990s	
St. Louis University, 1990s	
Syracuse University, 1990s	

Figure 5. Trends In Special Studies Programs



Specialized Studies Programs: Competition or Complementarity?

By 1980, 313 American Studies programs were tallied in the survey reported by the ASA. If we date the initial establishment of American Studies programs to the 1935-1940 period, then it took over 40 years for American Studies to reach this high water mark. In contrast, Stimpson (1986, p. 21) reports that 150 women's studies programs were established between 1970 and 1975, and the number had reached 300 by 1980. Along these same lines, Rojas reports 91 African-American studies programs established in the five years between 1968 and 1971 (see also Rojas, 2007; Rooks, 2006). Of course these figures may not be strictly comparable, given that the defining elements of what constitutes a program may differ, but clearly American Studies experienced more gradual long-term growth from the late 1930s through the mid 1980s, whereas African-American Studies and Women's Studies experienced much more explosive growth in a shorter period of time.¹³

Did American Studies help to pave the way for the creation of Women's Studies and African-American Studies programs? An intellectual case could be made for these connections. While few women appeared in the classic works of the myth and symbol era, by the 1960s American Studies was beginning to be more open to diverse scholarship. Griffin and Tempenis (2002) show that the race, gender and other multicultural themes were present in the pages of AQ during the 1960s and spiked after 1970.

In addition to intellectual contributions, it is interesting to consider the organizational linkages between American Studies and other specialized studies programs. In order to make the comparison as systematic as possible, these data are drawn from a common source, The College Blue Book. These data have several valuable features: there is a single, common metric for comparing across programs; the measures are consistent over time, and the data are gathered systematically from colleges and universities across the country (see Figure 5).

The 1970s was a fertile time for the proliferation of specialized programs. African-American Studies grew quite rapidly after the campus demonstrations of the late 1960s. Women's Studies followed suit shortly thereafter, but it was not until later in the 1970s that programs offered bachelor's degrees in women's studies became established. Given the expansion in the number of these alternative programs, the continued growth of American Studies during the 1970s is quite notable. The decade of the 2000s is another period in which all three fields experienced some growth. The trend

¹³ Estimates of the number of Women's Studies programs vary from 297 Institutional Affiliates of the National Women's Studies Association to 425 on the Artemis Guide website (<http://www.artemisguide.com/>) to over 900 (NWSA President Bervely Guy-Sheftall, quoted in *Ms. Magazine*, 2009). The 2006 NWSA census reported 652 programs, although only 560 of these responded to the survey. On the other hand, O'Barr and Shields (2003) reported only 11 PhD programs in Women's Studies in the U. S. 2003. The College Blue Book reports 163 schools offering bachelor's degrees in women's studies in 2007, trailing African-American Studies slightly (183).

during this period in all likelihood represents the acquisition of degree status of programs already in existence to a greater extent than the creation of new programs.

These data also suggest that the rise of African-American and Women's Studies did not substitute for American Studies as an organizational arrangement. All three grew at the same time. Moreover, the declines of late 1980s in American Studies was unique to this field and was not reflected in declines in other specialized studies programs. So in terms of general trends throughout higher education, African-American and Women's Studies appear to be complements to, rather than substitutes for, American Studies programs.

American Studies was neither necessary nor sufficient for the emergence¹⁴ of African American Studies. For example, 15 newly-formed African-American Studies programs in existence in 1970 overlapped with American Studies, while 18 did not. Nonetheless, the presence of American Studies appears to have facilitated the creation of African-American Studies programs.¹⁵

The conventional measure of association used to measure this type of relationship is the odds ratio. The most attractive property of this measure is that it is marginal independent; that is, it allows us to track the association over time without worrying about the relative growth in the prevalence of different programs.

Table 2 displays data on the association (odds ratios) between American Studies, African-American Studies and Women's Studies. The data indicate sizable relationships between these programs. In other words, these three sets of special studies programs were not distributed in U. S. colleges and universities at random but tended to overlap in the same institutions. The strongest connections are between African-American and Women's Studies.

Table 2. Relationship between American Studies, African-American Studies and Women's Studies Programs			
Year	American Studies/ African-American Studies	American Studies/ Women's Studies	African- American Studies/ Women's Studies
	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio
1970	7.65		

¹⁴ Rojas maintains that student protests played a significant role in the formation of African-American Studies programs.

¹⁵ While in only 45 percent of African-American Studies programs overlapped with American Studies, at that time only 2.6 percent of colleges and universities had African-American Studies. Put another way, 11 percent of the schools with established American Studies programs had newly formed African-American Studies programs in 1970, while only 1.6 percent of schools without American Studies programs had initiated African-American Studies. Since American Studies programs were established first, it seems plausible enough to suggest that any causal relationship would run in the direction of African-American Studies.

1976	3.84		
1981	5.07		
1986	5.7	5.46	10.42
1991	7.18	11.04	32.92
1996	6.11	6.55	17.24
2001	5.1	7.22	13.29
2006	4.24	6.91	18.7

The data presented in Table 2 strongly suggest a relationship among these special studies programs. However, these results do not necessarily prove a causal relationship because a) the associations are cross-sectional, and b) there is the possibility that other factors (such as school size) may be responsible for promoting each type of program.

We conducted a series of multivariate analyses designed to ascertain whether the presence of one ID program contributed to the subsequent creation of others. Given that American Studies was the first to be institutionalized, it makes most sense to see if the presence of American Studies increased the odds of the subsequent creation of African-American and Women's Studies programs. To illustrate this approach, we used the presence of an American Studies or African-American Studies program in any year before 2001 to predict the presence on the same campus of a Women's Studies Program in 2006. See summary of results in Table 3.

With no controls included in the model, the odds of having a Women's Studies program are 7 times greater if the school had an American Studies program five years earlier; the presence of an African-American Studies program five years earlier increases the odds by 14 fold. Taking both types of programs into account simultaneously brings these odds down to 5-fold and 10-fold, respectively. Add other controls to the model, such as school size and institutional selectivity, further reduces but does not eliminate these effects. In the final model, American Studies increases the changes of women's Studies by 3 fold, and African-American Studies does so by 5 fold. Sizeable effects, to be sure.

We repeated the analysis with African-American Studies as the outcome of interest. The impact of American Studies on African-American Studies was weaker, which makes sense given the unique history of African-American Studies programs. In the final model, the coefficient is not statistically significant.

We estimated these effects over the period 1976-2006 for African-American Studies and 1986-2006 for Women's Studies to see if the initial "chartering" impact was greater and weakened over time as these programs diffused according to their own logics. The results (presented in Table 4) studies provide some evidence for this dilution process in the case of

Table 3. Logistic Regressions Predicting The Presence of African-American and Women's Studies, 2006

	Women's Studies		African-American Studies	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Ever Previously Had American Studies	7.315*** (1.240)	3.077*** (0.643)	3.748*** (0.710)	1.446 (0.348)
Ever Previously Had African American Studies		5.063***	-----	
Enrollment (1000s)		1.092***		1.089***
% International		0.969		0.979
% Non-White		0.984*		1.022***
% Women		1.033***		1.014
Op.Bud/Student (\$1000s), Logged		2.744***		1.961**
Imputed Baron's Selectivity Score		1.290*		1.531***
Masters		0.870		1.094
PhD 30+		0.81		1.485
Pseudo R-squared	0.128	0.350	Pseudo R-squared	0.052

Notes: Significance levels: + p < .01; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table 4. Trends in the Chartering Effect of Interdisciplinary Studies Programs

	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006
A. Predicting Women's Studies							
American Studies (lagged)			1.807	2.148*	2.354***	2.643***	3.108***
African-American Studies (lagged)			4.935***	8.270***	5.428***	4.662***	5.099***
B. Predicting African-American Studies							
American Studies (lagged)	2.269**	2.348**	2.151*	2.164*	2.911***	1.955**	1.461(ns)

African-American Studies, but in the case of Women's Studies, the coefficients grow in strength over time. A possible explanation is that American Studies faculty on campus helped to support the institutionalization of Women's Studies in terms of practical, political and personal assistance, rather than through the more general process of legitimation which would be most relevant in the early years of Women's Studies.

If the results presented in these analyses can be generalized to other fields of inquiry, then efforts to introduce one set of ID programs will result in the proliferation

of additional ID programs. As a consequence, an ID-based university will offer many more programs based in many more units than is currently the case.

What other factors influence the institutionalization of Women's Studies and African-American Studies programs on campus? Resources matter. Larger schools and richer schools are more likely to feature these programs than are smaller schools with fewer resources per student. It is also the case that more selective institutions are more likely to feature these special-studies programs. It may be that less selective schools are more focused on applied programs of study and thus are less inclined to develop these less-applied and more academically-oriented programs.

Student demographics also matter. Women's Studies programs are more prevalent in schools with a larger fraction of female students, and African-American Studies programs are more common in schools with above-average shares of minority students. Members of the faculty like to feel that the power of their ideas will be sufficient to carry the day, but the broader patterns of institutional diffusion suggest that some colleges and universities offer a more hospitable landscape for the development and institutionalization of special-studies programs such as American Studies, Women's Studies, and African-American Studies.

In addition to the many accomplishments of American Studies faculty, scholars who helped to promote and institutionalize this field of scholarship can take credit for contributing to the subsequent rise and institutionalization of African-American and Women's Studies.

American Studies and the Social Sciences

The interdisciplinary agenda of American Studies has at times included the social sciences, and some scholars have continued to build bridges between the largely humanistic ASA and the social sciences. Indeed, at the 2008 ASA meetings there were a number of social science sessions: three anthropology sessions, four sociology sessions, and five sessions focused on ethnography. Nonetheless, American Studies has remained firmly rooted in the humanities. Griffin and Gross (1999) document the scarcity of references to social-science scholarship in the pages of the leading American Studies journals. Janssens (1999) suggests that many area studies programs have stronger ties to the social sciences than do American Studies programs, but he does not provide systematic evidence to support this hypothesis.

Why has it proven so difficult to forge strong links between American Studies and the social sciences? In part this reflected the rejection of Americanists of the quantitative methods employed by many social scientists.

Henry Nash Smith (1957) criticized the quantitative focus of his social-science contemporaries. This line of critique would presumably have been equally applicable to public opinion polls in political science and quantitative models in economics.

Over the 1960s and 1970s the intellectual trends in sociology largely militated against connections with American Studies. In the 1950s, broad-gauged scholars like David Riesman and Robert Merton could easily connect with concerns regarding Americanists' interest in American exceptionalism and national character than would

those that followed them a decade or two later. Indeed, Riesman served on the editorial board of the *American Quarterly*. By the 1970s, multivariate regression analyses dominated the leading journals in sociology, especially elaborate studies of intergenerational social mobility. Interest in humanistic and multicultural approaches would re-surface in sociology somewhat later.

The early intellectual connections to anthropology were quite evident, as the anthropologists' notion of culture held considerable appeal to founding American studies scholars (Janssens, 1999; Zenderland, 2006).¹⁶ But the connections remained stronger via common intellectual referents rather than in terms of contemporary practitioners. In the 1950s and 1960s relatively few anthropologists focused on the U. S. During that period, anthropologists earned their stripes by learning a native language and conducting their dissertation research in a non-western community. Thus, although Margaret Mead was active in the early years of the *American Quarterly*, few of her anthropological compatriots followed her lead.

In part the difficulty was a numbers game. In other words, the small size of American Studies meant that all but the very largest programs could include only a handful of social scientists. This meant that it was hard to cover much of social science, it was hard to do so in a particularly integrative or distinctive way, and it was hard to have much impact on how fellow social scientists approached social research.

Penn's American Civilization department represents a good example. The long-time department chair, Murray Murphey, viewed the social sciences as an important part of the interdisciplinary mix of the field. During his tenure as Editor of the *American Quarterly*, several papers advocating tighter linkages between the social sciences and humanities were published. Murphey was committed to including social scientists on the faculty. But even Penn could not really advance this agenda very far.

The American Civilization program at Penn achieved the status of its own department, and was thus more firmly institutionalized than at most universities. Even at Penn, however, American Civilization had only six or seven dedicated faculty members during the 1970s.¹⁷ There was thus room on the faculty for perhaps two or at most three social scientists. This representation of the social sciences in American Studies did not reach the critical mass needed to sustain itself, or to provide for innovative synergy with other social scientists.

During the 1970s and 1980s, perhaps the most compelling explanation for the modest presence of social science in American Studies can be found in the activities of a competing movement. The rise of social history was a more powerful magnet pulling historically oriented social scientists than was American Studies. Even historical

¹⁶ Murphey (1979) and Verheul (1999) note that the early ties to anthropology were weaker than some suppose. Murphey notes that Perry Miller was not conversant with anthropology, and Verheul notes that Henry Nash Smith does not use the word "culture" even once in *Virgin Land*. But the connections to anthropology during the 1950s, especially the direct personal tie via Margaret Mead, are inescapable. See also Spiller, 1960; also Janssens, 1999.

¹⁷ Penn's American Civilization Department peaked in size during the 1980s with nine faculty members in the department, along with five affiliated colleagues from anthropology, history, and folklore. University of Pennsylvania Bulletin, various years, from 1953-1994.

sociologists who were qualitative in their approach were more likely to connect with social science history because of a shared interest in explanation over interpretation.

Here again there is a Penn connection: Penn's Lee Benson was a prime mover in the development of the Social Science History Association (SSHA) and served as its first president (Benson, 1972; 1978; Bogue, 1987; see also Graff, 2001). Prominent sociologists (not at Penn), such as Charles Tilly and Theda Skocpol, and economic historians, including Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, were active in the SSHA.

Indeed, it is interesting to contrast the course of social science history with the American Studies movement. While both were ostensibly interdisciplinary, American Studies sought to create its own programs and its own departments. Social Science history endeavored to include economists, political scientists, sociologists, and others, but did not seek to create departments of social history.

Historians working within this framework labored largely within the confines of history departments rather than seeking a new set of institutional structures.

The tremendous popularity of quantitative social history during the 1970s spawned a backlash in the discipline of history and provoked a resurgence of interest in cultural themes (Sewell, 2005). I would submit that this flowering of more culturally-oriented history may well have contributed to the resurgence of American Studies during 1990s and 2000s.

The multicultural turn in late 1970s and 1980s actually brought American studies intellectually closer to sociology. Sociologists had become increasingly interested in culture, and interest in race, class and gender was shared by sociologists and Americanists. Anthropologists now study American society as well as tribal experiences in post-colonial contexts, and thus anthropologists and ethnographers are now represented at American Studies conferences. So once again there are intellectual opportunities for connections, especially among social scientists involved in Ethnic Studies, African-American Studies or Gender Studies. However, to date, the social science connections remain secondary. Griffin and Tempenis (2002), for example, have shown that traditional concerns of sociologists such as social class remain at the margins of American Studies scholarship even as multicultural themes have become very prominent.

The remaining gaps appear to be more a matter of method than of substantive interests. Few Americanists have been trained as ethnographers, while relatively few sociologists and anthropologists do primary research in archives as historians or use texts as principal sources. There is also little push towards American Studies from the social scientists' side. There is plenty of room for ethnographic or humanistic approaches in the social sciences, at least in anthropology, sociology and political science. In sociology, the advent of interest in comparative social history has led to stronger connections with social history located in history departments rather than to the cultural history based in American studies programs.

My explanation of the disconnect between the social sciences and American Studies is a shifting one, which points to evolving intellectual trajectories, missed opportunities, and more successful competitors. To build enduring ties, there needs to

be a shared substantive interest, shared techniques, and a complementarity that gives those engaging in interdisciplinary work a clear and compelling advantage over those who remain stuck in their disciplinary ruts. The social-science linkages with American Studies have not yielded this type of comparative advantage, and thus this interdisciplinary frontier remains under-developed.

Division within American Studies: Interdisciplinarity and Internal Differentiation

Thus, despite its commitment to interdisciplinarity, American Studies established some cross-field ties more effectively than others, with ties to the social sciences being notably weak. Now it is time to reverse the question in order to consider the degree of integration and communication within the field.

Advocates of interdisciplinarity caricature established disciplines as hermetically sealed enclaves, closed silos that are all but impervious to intellectual trends in other fields. In contrast to this dismal state of academic balkanization, true interdisciplinarity is held up as a fully integrated alternative where barriers to communication across specialties have been shattered (see Jacobs and Frickel, 2009, for a review).

In this section, I consider how far American Studies has traveled in the direction of complete academic integration. By examining the reception of American Studies research, we can see whether its impact has been broadly felt throughout the humanities or whether it has been confined to its own narrow niche. I will utilize the citation patterns of articles published in the *American Historical Review*, *The Journal of American History*, *American Literature* and *American Literary History* as baselines for comparison with *American Quarterly*, the leading American Studies journal. In other words, the issue is identifying where *American Quarterly* (AQ) papers are visible, and also how this pattern compares to papers published in established disciplinary journals.

It should be noted at the outset that this analysis focuses on academic journal articles, and ignores books both as a source of scholarship and as a scholarly audience. It also ignores other types of influence, such as the inclusion on course syllabi or reviews appearing in the *New York Times* or the *New York Review of Books*. This is a particular weakness in the humanities because only a modest share of scholarship appears in journal articles. However limited in coverage, the analysis will nonetheless be informative for several reasons. First, this analysis draws on research that can be clearly identified as representing American Studies. If I included books as sources, the appropriateness of particular entries as representative of American-studies scholarship could be debated. Second, it draws on the established classification of hundreds of journals by the ISI Citation system. Third, the analysis focuses on the reception of American Studies research in journals in order to consider the range of influence rather than extent of influence. In other words, articles appearing in AQ may be more influential than the citation scores in journals indicate, but the journal analysis is nonetheless powerful in providing a picture of the fields to which the audience extends.

Table 5. Citations to Articles in American Quarterly, by Subject Area of Citing Journal	American Quarterly
Subject	All

Category of Citing Journal	Articles
	Percent of Citations
American History	22.6
American Literature	10.0
Literature	11.6
Humanities, Interdisciplinary	10.6
Sociology	6.2
Law	5.2
Geography	4.8
Women's Studies	4.0
Anthropology	3.2
History of Social Sciences	3.2

Overall, citations to articles in *American Quarterly* appear in journals spanning a wide range of disciplines (see Table 5). Nearly one-third of AQ articles were cited in history journals (31.3 percent), somewhat more than journals in literature and American literature, which combine to just under one in five (10.6+8.5=19.1 percent). The next ranking area is interdisciplinary journals in the humanities. (Roughly 45 percent of these citations appear in other articles published in AQ itself, and well over half are found in various American Studies journals.) Other fields citing AQ articles include sociology, law,

religion and women's studies.

Thus, there is support for the claim that the *American Quarterly* is interdisciplinary to a large extent. There is variability, however, among AQ articles: some are based on archival

and other historical methods and are consequently of greater interest to historians, while others are based on literary analysis and are more likely to appear to literary scholars. So the next question is the diversity in the reception of papers published in AQ. In order to address this question, I coded all of the papers with 15 or more citations into one of three categories: historical, literary, or theoretical/social themes (see Table 6).

Panel A. American Quarterly Articles				
Subject Category of Citing Journal	All Articles (percent)	Historical Articles (percent)	Literary Articles (percent)	Theory/Social Science Articles (percent)
American History	22.6	47.3	23.1	12.1
American Literature	10	6.3	26.9	8.1
Literature	11.6	4.8	19.2	12.9
Humanities	10.6	14	15.4	19.4
Panel B. Comparison of Articles from Four Journals				
Subject Category of Citing Journal	American Quarterly	American History Review	American Literature	American Literary History

	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
American History	22.6	53	4.4	4.8
American Literature	10	2.6	34.4	28
Literature	11.6	3.2	37	34.6
Humanities	10.6	7.4	10	11.2

The contrast between literary and historical papers published in *AQ* is clear. The audiences for these two groups of papers are roughly mirror images of one another. Roughly half of historical papers are cited in historical journals, while only about one in ten citations appears in literature journals. In contrast, among the *AQ* articles devoted to literature, just under half are cited in literature journals, while about one in five are cited in historical journals. Thus, when we take *AQ* as a whole, the audience appears to be remarkably diverse, but when we divide its papers along disciplinary lines, it is clear that the audience as well remains substantially divided.¹⁸

Another way to get insights into the reception of papers published in *AQ* is to compare them to journals specializing in history and literature. As we have seen, historically-oriented papers published in *AQ* are more likely to be visible and influential in history journals. For this group, 47.3 percent of the references appear in history journals. How does this compare to articles published in history journals? Using the *American Historical Review* as a point of comparison, I found that 53 percent of citations to *AHR* articles appear in history journals. Thus, historically-orientated papers in *AQ* are only slightly more likely to reach an interdisciplinary audience (47 versus 53) than are those published in a journal firmly rooted in the discipline of history. Articles published in the *Journal of American History* have a somewhat stronger disciplinary audience. Sixty percent of the citations are in history journals, while the rest are distributed across the social sciences and humanities. The fact that 40 percent or more of the references to these history journals come from fields outside of history is itself notable: the audience for historical research is hardly confined to a single field. This does not fit with the picture of isolated disciplinary silos advanced by advocates of interdisciplinarity.

The picture of disciplinary closure is somewhat more evident in literature. The citations to articles in the journal *American Literature* overwhelmingly appear in literary journals: 71.4 of the references appear in either literature or American literature journals. I replicated these results with another journal, *American Literary History*, with largely the same results. In contrast, the *AQ* literature papers appear much more broadly directed. Just under half (46.1) of the citations to literary-oriented *AQ* articles appear in literary journals, compared with more than two-thirds in *AL*. This suggests that the interdisciplinary increment or “bounce” for literary scholars of publishing in *AQ* is substantial, and is somewhat greater than is evident for historical papers.

¹⁸ Another source of division is by nationality: American Studies scholars based in countries outside the United States complain that U. S. scholars do not pay sufficient attention to their scholarship (Rydell, 1999).

The final category of *AQ* articles was what I called theory/ social issues. For example, these are papers that explore the nature of multiculturalism, or seek to “redefine suburbia.” Where are these hybrid papers cited?

These papers have a remarkably diverse audience. About one in five are cited in literature journals and another one in five were cited in interdisciplinary humanities journals, while roughly one in ten are cited in journals in the social sciences and history, with references in anthropology and urban studies journals not uncommon. There is, then, a category of broadly-oriented papers with a potentially broad audience.

In considering the citations patterns of the *American Quarterly*, Barbara Welter’s piece deserves its own mention. Welter’s paper 1966, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” has been cited over 500 times in academic journal articles, while no other paper in the history of *AQ* has been cited more than 100 times. This paper has been cited far more than any paper in the four established disciplinary journals discussed above. The impact was as diverse as it was powerful: 29.4 percent of the citations appear in history journals, 14.8 percent in literature journals, 11.8 percent in multidisciplinary humanities journals and 7.8 percent in women’s studies journals. Welter’s paper has also been widely cited in journals in sociology, the history of social sciences, education, law, religion and many other fields. Mary Kelley (1999) notes that much of Welter’s analysis has been challenged by subsequent research, yet it is clear that Welter’s study was paradigmatic for a generation of feminist scholarship.

Would “The Cult of True Womanhood” have made as many waves had it been published in the *American Historical Review*? Of course there is no way to give a definitive answer to this counterfactual question. But Welter’s piece was not published in *AHR*, and perhaps for a reason. During this era, little that could be described as feminist scholarship appeared in *AHR*, and thus *AQ* likely performed a valuable service in providing a prominent alternative outlet for research that was not considered serious enough or mainstream enough to be published in the disciplinary outlets. I could find no articles in *AHR* that focused on women or women’s issues after 1960 until Edward Shorter’s 1973 study of birth control. It really is not until Jane Abrey’s 1975 paper that a self-consciously feminist paper is published in *AHR*. In the *Journal of American History*, only a couple of papers on women’s topics appeared before the 1973 paper coauthored by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg on medical and biological views of women during the 19th century.¹⁹ On the other hand, both *JAH* and *AHR* were more receptive to research on topics of race than gender during this particularly period. As noted above, Griffin and Tempen (2002) document the prominence of studies of race and gender in the pages of *AQ* during the 1960s.

While *AQ* served an important role as an alternative outlet for innovative research, it is not necessary that a journal take an interdisciplinary form to achieve this result. Thus, *Gender and Society* appeared as a feminist journal in sociology in 1986 and *Feminist Economics* in 1994 as an alternative outlet in the discipline of economics.

¹⁹ James McGovern’s 1968 paper explored expanding freedom for women in “manners and morals,” while Edward M. Steel’s 1970 paper on Mother Jones focused at least as much of issues of union organizing as on gender themes.

These findings from a citation analysis of *AQ* suggest that American Studies has been somewhat successful in breaking down academic boundaries. Articles are more widely cited if published in *AQ* than in disciplinary journals. Just to be clear: publication in *AQ* does not necessarily mean more visibility, influence or citations, but rather citations by a wider audience than is typical in disciplinary journals. In relative terms, this is most true of literary articles, which rarely find a broad external audience when published in journals such as *American Literature*. Historical articles in *AQ* were more broadly cited than papers published in *AHR*, but only by a modest amount, since roughly half of *AHR* citations appear in journals outside of history. The papers with the most diverse audience were those focused on broad themes such as the nature of multiculturalism. Yet *AQ* audiences remain somewhat divided internally, with papers more likely to find an audience in a cognate discipline than else. Historically-oriented papers are thus more likely to be cited in historical journals and literary articles are more likely to be cited in literature journals.

Conclusion: American Studies and Interdisciplinarity

While the early scholars of American Studies sought a unified, over-arching understanding of American culture modeled on an anthropological approach to culture, subsequent generations of scholarship have become increasingly fragmented by topic. What are the prospects for integration going forward?

A recent (2008) program of the meetings of the American Studies Association reveals the remarkable scope and specialization of researchers attending the conference. Papers were organized by period (Early American Studies, nineteenth century, twentieth century); by ethnicity (African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Chicano Studies, Native American Studies, Pacific Islander Studies) and by place (Border Studies, Cultural Geography, and Landscape and the Built Environment). The conference included a variety of approaches to gender issues (Gender and Sexuality, Queer Studies, Transgender Studies), and global perspectives (Global, Transnational, Cross Cultural, Post-Colonial Studies, and studies of U. S. Colonialism). The study of culture extended beyond a narrow set of canonical authors to include Popular Culture, Print Culture, Material Culture, Foodways, Music, Film, Television and Media Studies, Performance Studies and Visual Cultural Studies.

While considerable vitality and dynamism is evident in this list, these diverse topics are not unified by a single or even a small set of theoretical perspectives. Moreover, in addition to these topical divisions runs a deeper divide between those scholars focused principally on literature, or using literature as a primary source material, and those starting with archival or other source material. Thus, a session on "Ecocriticism from Melville to Yamashita" examines environmental themes in literature while another entitled "Environmental History and Policy-Making in the United States and Mexico" included papers which marshal historical evidence on environmental politics. The citation data discussed above indicate that the audience for these papers is likely to differ.

This pattern suggests that interdisciplinarity is not synonymous with integration. The field of American Studies is not likely to draw together under a unified theoretical banner any time soon. While this type of differentiation is by no means unique to American Studies, the diversity of topics and frameworks is probably viewed by Americanists more a source for celebration and less of a cause for concern than in other fields. Indeed, if a unified conception of culture were to emerge, the current generation of American Studies scholars would probably be among the first to rebel against this common framework.

Advocates of interdisciplinarity seek to go beyond merely drawing on disparate influences to achieve a new theoretical synthesis. They lament the fact that many efforts at interdisciplinarity fall short of this goal. In the terminology commonly employed in this area, studies that draw on disparate disciplinary sources are multi-disciplinary; only those that are truly synthetic are worthy of the label interdisciplinary.²⁰

What light does the history of American Studies shed on the prospects for true interdisciplinary synthesis? American Studies during the 1950s did in fact achieve an original synthesis. The myth and symbol approach to American culture drew on diverse sources but represented a distinctive perspective developed largely by American Studies scholars. This was a collective achievement, the result of a group of scholars who interacted with one another and who built on each other's contributions. But this synthesis did not survive the fractured political landscape of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In other words, achieving a real synthesis of ideas and methods across disciplines is really just the beginning. For the emerging paradigm to endure, it must continue to generate a dynamic research agenda that elicits commitment from succeeding generations of scholars. In the case of American Studies, a power and unique synthesis was successful for a time but was ultimately replaced by a broad, diverse and evolving set of agendas.

The evolution of American Studies and related fields and disciplines suggests that the intellectual landscape can fruitfully be organized in many ways. American Studies is one interdisciplinary approach that puts American culture but not the American economy or institutions at the center of its intellectual agenda. Global Studies is interdisciplinary as well but takes globalization rather than America as its main focal point. African-American Studies gives priority to the African-American experience while Africana Studies places African and the African Diaspora center-stage. Each of these fields represents an intellectual movement; each is interdisciplinary; each of these has carved out a niche in American academia, but none has become fully institutionalized as an alternative to the established disciplines.

In its efforts to transcend disciplinary boundaries, a fully interdisciplinary approach to academia would create a dizzying array of alternative maps of the intellectual terrain. The history of American Studies suggests that these alternative

²⁰ With reference to the disciplinary status of women's studies, Alice Ginsberg's list of terms of include "multidisciplinary, intradisciplinary, nondisciplinary, antisciplinary, neo-disciplinary, transdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, critical interdisciplinary, intersectional, intertextual, and pluridisciplinary" (2008, p. 13).

studies could themselves morph over time in ways that would surprise and sometimes dishearten the founders of these intellectual movements.

A final lesson to be learned from the history of American Studies is that successful interdisciplinary endeavors are not about individual scholars making ties between fields, or even organized efforts to promote communication across disciplinary boundaries. Enduring interdisciplinary ties like those formed by American Studies scholars take years to develop and depend upon the efforts of a substantial group of researchers. They must be powerful enough to draw in substantial numbers of scholars, to develop journals, to host conferences and to create national associations. These intellectual currents do not arise every day, and do not fit the efforts of most individual scholars seeking to develop particular connections between fields. For all of its limitations, American Studies has proven to be a far more dynamic and enduring interdisciplinary force than most small-scale efforts to promote interdisciplinarity by university administrators or researchers.

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