What Skills Does a Degree in American Studies Provide?

American Studies majors will develop a variety of skills that are attractive to employers across all fields. Some of the top skills an American Studies major will develop include:

- Effective writing and oral communication
- Finding solutions to intricate problems
- Perceiving the world from multiple points of view
- Creating persuasive messages
- Influencing and persuading
- Advocating for causes, products and services
- Ability to read, reflect, and critique
- Gathering information
- Working with others
- Using original sources
- Meeting deadlines and managing time

- Summarizing and presenting information
- Understanding components of complex problems
- Evaluating results
- Perceiving patterns/structures
- Analyzing texts and information
- Comparing/contrasting
- Writing creatively
- Synthesizing information
- Managing a project from conception to completion
- Reading critically
- Interpreting data

In the National Association of Colleges & Employers' (NACE) 2011 Job Outlook, the skills and abilities such employers are seeking were listed in order of importance. The top ten skills were:

- Communication (verbal)
- Strong work ethic
- Teamwork
- Analytical skills
- Initiative
- Problem-solving skills
- Communication (written)
- Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)
- Computer skills
- Flexibility/adaptability

Organizations consistently seek candidates who possess a collection of “transferable skills” - skills acquired through your classes, extracurricular involvement, experience, and hobbies that are applicable to virtually any position. The skills listed above all fit into this category and students in the Arts & Humanities, as noted by professionals and academics alike, participate in a rich curriculum that develops their skills in many, if not all, of these areas and beyond, making them extremely marketable and valuable to potential employers. In the current Recruiting Trends report put out by the Collegiate Employment Research Institute, nearly 40% of employers indicate that they will seek candidates across “all majors,” focusing more on the skills and abilities needed in the organization than on a specific academic discipline.

Why American Studies?

Maryland’s undergraduate program in American Studies is one of the nation’s oldest and best regarded. Originally conceived as a cooperative venture combining Sociology, Government, U. S. History, and American Literature, American Studies continues to be an interdisciplinary field that draws widely on the University’s superb resources in the humanities and social sciences as well as the intellectual resources of the Washington, D. C. area.

Two broad themes inform the department’s teaching and research: the cultural construction of identity and difference and the cultures of everyday life. The former speaks to the ways in which affiliations are created and sustained; the latter focuses on patterns of belief and value that give form and meaning to the lived experience of Americans, past and present. Through these emphases, the program aims to help students develop knowledge about American society and culture that is critical, contextual, and informed by a high degree of personal awareness.
What Can I Do With an American Studies Degree?

An American Studies degree can be shaped to fit a variety of disciplines and the broad skill set you acquire allows you to apply your knowledge in many exciting areas. From the University Career Center’s most recent graduate survey, upon graduation ARHU students entered into a range of dynamic industries including:

- Arts, Government, Academia/Education, Non-Profit/Philanthropy, Health Services/Healthcare Communications/Media, Advertising, Technology, Food & Hospitality Services, Entertainment, Social Services and more!

Sample job titles include:

- Archivist
- Librarian
- FBI/CIA Agent
- Law Enforcement
- Biographer
- Park Ranger
- Museum Curator
- Urban Planner
- Lawyer
- Lobbyist
- Archeologist
- Writer/Author
- Congressional Aide
- Demographer

- Research Assistant
- Counselor
- Foreign Service Officer
- Editor
- Historic Preservationist
- Financial Advisor
- Intelligence Analyst
- Real Estate Agent
- Economist
- Public Relations Specialist

- Market Research Analyst
- Sales Representative
- Consumer Advocate
- Travel Agent
- Teacher
- Stock Broker
- Non-profit Consultant
- Social Activist

Gaining Experience With Your Degree

It’s never too early to start your search for experience. Ideally, you should begin at least one semester in advance. Make an appointment to talk with the University Career Center & The President’s Promise and/or your department internship coordinator and faculty advisor. Research shows that having an internship (or multiple internships) drastically increases your ability to obtain a full-time position upon graduation, especially since most employers use their intern pool as a direct talent pipeline. The most recent NACE Internship & Co-op Survey reported that 44.6% of employers’ hires came from their internship programs. The College of Arts & Humanities ensures that students can have an internship experience prior to graduating, offering numerous credit-granting courses for experiential education at the college and departmental level.

Internships enable students to gain a sense of what it would be like to work in a particular field as they develop marketable skills and establish contacts that may lead to a job offer upon graduation. To get started, visit the University Career Center & The President’s Promise website (www.Careers.umd.edu) and sign up for a Careers4Terps account, a free web-based job posting service, to search for internships and employment.