AMERICAN STUDIES
OUR GRADUATES
THE PAST DECADE: 2011 - 2021
A degree in American Studies from the University of Manchester provides you with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to embark on a successful, and rewarding career in the global workplace of the twenty-first century. As the programme's undergraduate admissions tutor for the past five years, applicants (and their parents) regularly asked me where a degree in American Studies could lead them. This booklet is, in part, intended as an answer to that question.

What follows are profiles of eleven of those who graduated from our programme during the past decade. They took degrees in single honours American Studies (AS), History and American Studies (HAS), and English Literature and American Studies (ELAS). While the booklet showcases the tremendous professional achievements of these individuals, it also conveys the variety of career paths that arise from studying with us. These include positions in the professions of law and accountancy—both captured here—as well as in financial services, insurance, and surveying. Almost 10% of our graduates become teachers, often as secondary teachers of English Literature or History. Many who pursue teaching do so after taking one of our joint degrees. These combine subject-area training, with a wider grasp of cultural and political factors, and specialization in the literatures or history of the Americas.

While this is an admittedly modest sample of the six hundred or so people who have graduated from our programme since 2011, it does indicate some of the sectors where our graduates are now thriving. These include the realms of: publishing and editing; television and radio production; broadcasting and journalism; public relations, communications, and marketing. Such realms—now called the ‘creative industries’—are those with which our degrees have long been associated, and, given forecasts about the sector’s growth, with which it is likely to continue to be.*

Some have gone on to careers in the creative and performing arts, including as art practitioners, screen writers, game designers (Nihal Tharoor, HAS ‘14) and professional actors (Flora Higgins, ELAS ‘19). Many more have taken up roles in arts administration and the cultural heritage sectors, including at the British Council (Isobel Cecil, ELAS ‘15), at the Centre for Sustainable Fashion (Lou Budd, AS ‘14), and in records administration at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Meg Venter, AS ‘11).

While this pattern has been especially notable in recent years, it is confirmed by past cohorts. Those who graduated in earlier years now occupy commanding positions in their professions. Caj Sohal (AS ‘91) is the head of Channel 5 Sport; Julia Fry (AS ‘98) is an associate publisher at Hearst magazines in New York; and Ed Mallin (ELAS ‘05) is a creative director at DAZN.

That so many American Studies graduates took up positions in the cultural sectors over the past decade is the direct result of the opportunities we offer in the classroom: to think about global media; to engage with the production of film, music, photography, and literature; to examine contemporary politics and current affairs. It is also testament to the skills we nurture in our students, developing their command of cultural analysis, contextualization, and political critique, and training them to convey their thoughts with clarity on the page and in person. The opportunity to spend time—potentially one-year—in North America as part of a degree is also of huge reward, and, as several graduates note below, of considerable professional advantage.

Finally, because all of our degrees immerse students in contemporary and global affairs, it is not surprising that a number enter politics, including as elected Members of Parliament (Kirsty Williams, AS ‘93) or political strategists (Lydia Paver AS ‘14). Others take up issues of social justice through advocacy groups, and non-governmental organizations (Romy Biscoe ELAS ‘18).

We know from government figures that 75% of our graduates are in ‘highly skilled work’, or further study, shortly after they leave us.** This booklet aims to give you a sense of how our most recent graduates found their way into those careers. It shows that many take a year—during which they continue to have access to the University’s Careers Service—to establish themselves in a field. They do so by completing graduate training schemes, pursuing professional qualifications, or advancing upwards from entry-level roles. By telling the stories of alumni who graduated recently from our programme, we hope to help you envisage the professional opportunities that lie ahead if you pursue a degree in American Studies with us here at the University of Manchester.

Dr. Andrew Fearnley
The University of Manchester


**www.discoveruni.gov.uk/course-details/10007798/2570000/FullTime/
My role involves acquiring new authors and books, editing manuscripts, and managing them through the publication process. This requires working closely with our marketing, publicity, sales, design and production teams. I also read a lot of new manuscripts every month, mostly sent by literary agents acting on behalf of authors—I’ll sometimes receive over 30 submissions a month at busy times of the year.

An important part of my job is cultivating relationships with these agents so that when they have an exciting new project, they include me in their submission. Agents will send the same submission to many different editors, and – if it’s a good one! – it’ll be a race to read it first, get my team to read it and like it enough to get an offer together. If my offer is accepted, I then work with the author on the manuscript—the plot, the characters, the pacing—this is absolutely my favourite part of the job. It’s a really collaborative process that requires a firm but sensitive approach!

I have always loved books, so reading English and American Studies at University was a natural choice.

I really wanted to work in Editorial. This is one of the most competitive departments, both for work experience and actual jobs, and, eventually, I ended up getting a job at a children’s book publisher, as an admin assistant within the Editorial team—close enough!

I always knew I wanted to work for an adult publisher, so, after one year, the application process started again and I was eventually offered a job in the copy-editorial department at my current company, Transworld Publishers. The copy-editorial team handle the essential but slightly less glamorous side of the process: they’re the spelling, punctuation, and grammar police, who make sure that a character who has blue eyes on page 9 doesn’t then have brown eyes on page 109. After 18 months, a position as assistant editor on the crime and thriller list came up in the commercial fiction team, and I’ve been on this team for five years now, rising first to editor, and now to commissioning editor.

My time at Manchester was invaluable for understanding the importance of working to deadlines, being organised, and learning how to prioritise my workload. Studying English and American Studies meant that I had experience in evaluating and responding to a text—a great starting point for learning how to edit—and for reading across a wide variety of topics and styles. A love of reading is of course absolutely vital for those wanting to work in publishing, and for anyone starting out or applying for entry-level roles, it is so important to understand the type of publishing the company you are applying to specialises in—and keeping up with who the recent Sunday Times and Kindle chart bestselling authors are, and which titles Waterstones are featuring in their latest ‘Books of the Month’ promotion.

My role now also involves a certain amount of strategic planning, and I will take greater responsibility for this as and when I reach the next stage of my career (traditionally the next steps up are senior commissioning editor, editorial director, publishing director).
Cai Reaich (HAS ‘14) is the Global User Experience (UX) Manager for Education at Cambridge University Press. The Education department is responsible for publishing resources for UK and international primary and secondary schools.

UX design, or User Experience, is often pigeon-holed as web design—however it is actually a much broader field. It encompasses any interaction or experience a customer has with a business—a sales call, a textbook, use of a video bank, making a complaint. This means that while I do design websites, I also conduct customer feedback, run workshops to identify problems, and test ideas with customers.

As a Global UX Manager for Education I am fortunate that my work straddles user experience, education, and publishing. This is great because it really diversifies my working week. Instead of just worrying about whether our designs affect sales conversions, we also consider if we are helping children learn, and teachers teach effectively. The most rewarding aspect of my role is talking to teachers across the world. Surprisingly the life of an educational publisher is fairly glamorous: I have travelled to India, South Africa, Mozambique, USA, Qatar, Oman and Australia to conduct research.

I was one of the first UX designers at Cambridge University Press, so I have been fortunate to help shape its design culture. Since 2017 we have embedded direct customer research into product development, tracked the impact of our work, and introduced tools to maximise our scalability. Over the years my role has shifted from more focused screen design to bigger picture operations and strategic planning.

I’m fairly certain that I am the only designer at CUP who has a degree in History and American Studies. My colleagues are always surprised when I mention it. However, I think my degree prepared me perfectly for my role and has allowed me to differentiate myself within the field. While I’m still learning much of the graphic design elements of my job (typography still remains alien to me), my research, analysis and synthesis skills are regularly put to use. Both History and American Studies required me to gather and evaluate evidence, balance theories and present an argument—all of which are components of product development and UX design.

Design is also a field that acknowledges that your first attempt at solving a problem is likely to be rubbish so you’re going to have to try again. This is something I was definitely used to with my first draft essays! Finally, during my year abroad at the University of California we were required to do a lot of presentations—from book reports to seminar debates. While this was challenging at the time, it enabled me to be able to present to large audiences comfortably. I was actually scheduled to speak at the 2020 London Book Fair, and am excited to be on the judging panel for their International Excellence Awards for Educational Learning Resources in 2021.

My future ambitions at the Press fall into two categories: products and operations. Product-wise it feels as if the world is on the cusp of some exciting digital learning products. Hopefully, with the shift in how schools, governments and universities now view digital, we can get the investment to develop transformative solutions. I’ve been surprised by how much I’ve enjoyed the educational and pedagogical layer of working at CUP, and I’d like any future role to encompass something similar. In terms of operations I really want to shift the culture at the Press, we’re moving in the right direction but given that it was founded in 1534, what feels like fast progress for the business is slow progress for everyone else!
The fact that I could study abroad—which I did at the University of North Carolina—was enticing too.

What my experience at Manchester gave me was a growing appetite for discussion, debate, and research. I honed my writing skills and was introduced to texts and films that I will always love. On and off my course, I made friends who remain among my closest. All these things I am grateful for, and I know that my decision to study here—one based on the course's choice of modules, the University's reputation for academic achievement, and Manchester's cultural offerings—was the right one for me.

After graduating, I felt motivated for another year of study and went to read a Master's in American Literature at the University of Cambridge. While there I realised that art, or more specifically, museums and galleries, was what I really wanted to pursue. I began volunteering at Watts Gallery in Surrey, close to where I grew up. After several chance meetings with the gallery's curators (volunteering is a great way to get on the radar of an organisation's decision makers), I applied for a job vacancy in the Marketing team and was offered the position. I spent two years at Watts Gallery before applying for my current job, which I started in the summer of 2019.

When thinking about my future, I like to imagine it entails more research, perhaps a PhD, in something with closer ties to art. For now, though, I am content to focus on my role at Tate, learning all I can from the many books with which I am so fortunate to share a space.

My job, in essence, is to increase sales of Tate-published books. It involves writing press releases and liaising with journalists, organising book launches, designing sales materials, and managing Tate Publishing's social media accounts. I am fortunate to see books go from pitch—when they are just an idea, or a list of linked images—to the finished product. When they are in their early stages, books are sent to my team for feedback based on what we believe will sell. Once a book is completed—a process that can take years—and I find it on my desk gleaming with newness, it is my job to tell people about it, securing reviews, using adverts, and talking with the shop teams about where it ought to be displayed.

For someone who loves art and books my job is a fulfilling one. Broadly speaking, Tate's books fall into two categories. The first, 'trade' titles, is those that are not linked to its public programme but which draw on the museum's collection. This includes artist monographs, art historical accounts, facsimiles, children's picture books, and what are often referred to as 'coffee table' books. The second category is the exhibition books, or 'catalogues', published to coincide with the opening of a Tate exhibition, and for which Tate Publishing is best known.

I am lucky in that my job necessitates being immersed in these books. They are packed into the office, line the walls of bookcases, or perch like birds atop filing cabinets. This is what I love most about going into work. Since I was young, I have enjoyed reading and handling books, and by the time I was studying for my A-Levels, English had become my best subject.

American Studies offered an opportunity to read literature—and to do so alongside history, film, cultural studies, and art history. I was drawn to what I saw as the degree's diversity and its contemporary relevance.
Megan Sutherland (HAS ‘17) is communications and outreach officer for the British Board of Film Classification

The BBFC is an independent content regulator, which helps everyone in the UK choose age-appropriate films, TV, and online content. My role as the agency’s communications and outreach officer is an exciting one, spanning several areas of the organization. I work across multiple campaigns throughout the year, liaise with journalists, plan press events, write content and promote the important work the BBFC does generally. I host the BBFC Podcast (www.bbfc.co.uk/about-us/news/podcasts), offering an insider’s view of classifications and featuring guest interviews, discussions of age rating decision, and key classification issues. I also work closely with our education department, designing resources for teachers and young people, including informational guides, case studies, and family movie packs. I enjoy being able to help young people think critically about film and to navigate media confidently, and these were two core areas of my degree.

Studying History and American Studies allowed me to explore different disciplines and topics, and to hone my interest in film. During my time at Manchester, I was also able to study abroad, and the experience made me much more confident. My placement at the University of Maryland campus, in College Park, close to Washington DC, meant I spent lots of time exploring independently. I learned to negotiate better, and adapt to new situations quickly, while also learning a whole new way to study.

Ever since I was young, I’ve had a keen interest in writing. Prior to entering University, I wrote a regular column for a local magazine, and did placements at a number of marketing and communications departments. Following graduation, I immediately took an admin job in commercial property, where I learned about the production of press releases and content. All of this was crucial when I interviewed at the BBFC and, along with my degree and film knowledge, those experiences aided me in getting my current job. In the future, I hope to continue my development within the communications field. I love the creativity and fast-paced nature of the profession and would love to advance within the field.
There is rarely a typical week as a freelance artist and practitioner. I am a poet and performer based in Birmingham, an Associate of Beatfreeks, one of the city’s youth engagement groups, and the Development Coordinator with Punch, an arts organisation in Digbeth that delivers award-winning arts development programmes, commissions work, and engages with different audiences. Some examples of my work can be found on my website, https://esotarik.wordpress.com/videos, and also at wearepunch.co.uk.

To give an example of what my week could entail, in 2019 I was working three days for Punch; an evening at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry as a youth worker; and a day for several other organisations—putting on workshops in schools and arts venues. In between, I may also have a performance or two booked, but I would also be checking opportunities pages for artist commission briefs. Most artists at my stage of career don’t make a living solely from their craft. That income is often supplemented by workshop delivery, teaching, or production. Work often comes up at short notice, which requires a good level of organisation and flexibility. I found that my self-employment became sustainable when I had regular freelance work balanced with enough time for writing and wellbeing.

Key freelance contracts came through relationships that I had developed with arts organisations over several years. These now include Beatfreeks, and Punch. I graduated from Gallery 37, Punch’s flagship artist development programme in 2016 and was commissioned to produce and launch my first collection of poetry. The following year I supported artists on the next Gallery 37 programme, and had the privilege of introducing one of my favourite poets, UoM Chancellor, Lemn Sissay MBE, as the event’s keynote speaker.

My degree prepared me for every role I have had. I have been happiest in roles that allow a good degree of autonomy and initiative, and require me to use the writing, communication and research skills that I strengthened while completing my American Studies degree. As an artist and arts practitioner, a humanities degree offered an ideal foundation, exposing me to formative works of literature, film and music. I’ve continued to use the critical thinking and writing skills that I honed at university, from writing creatively to writing funding applications, both of which can also involve significant amounts of research. The semester I spent at the University of Maryland was spent in halls with Americans and other international students and was also very enjoyable and eye-opening.

It took approximately a year after graduation, in 2012, for me to get a job that felt right—a graduate teaching assistant post that I loved. While I was in that role I heard about Beatfreeks, a youth engagement organisation in Birmingham that was running an artist development programme. I signed up for their spoken word/poetry camp, and after ten weekly sessions I performed during a showcase event featuring other emerging artists. Although I had been writing for a few years, I had never considered performance before. That performance went well and led to more opportunities.

My first commissioned work as a poet came in 2015. I wrote and recorded poetry for the Birmingham Big Art Project launch, and also for MyChainReaction, a research project based at University of Warwick that used poetry to create public information videos about ethical supply chains. Those two commissions were both very enjoyable and helped me to realise that I could earn, or at least supplement, my income through my art. I continued to write, perform at local venues, and apply for commissions while working in education. After two years in a graduate teaching assistant role, I entered teacher training in 2015. I completed eight months of my PGCE, but was unable to complete my final placement. For that entire year, I found I didn’t have enough time to write or perform, and stagnated as an artist. I continued to work in schools, though now doing so as a mentor with a social enterprise. After two years, I decided to move on to achieve a better work-life balance, and to ensure I had enough free time to continue to develop as an artist. A catalyst for that decision was the writer and performer Roger Robinson, who helped me to realise that I needed to find a way to put more energy into my art to achieve more. I became self-employed as a freelance artist and facilitator.

The creative sector already looks very different since the pandemic began, but the resilience and ingenuity of creative practitioners has seen many events, programmes and projects adapted for online delivery or social distancing. Emergency funding has also been important. The value of the creative sector to the UK is huge, and this is especially true in my home city. I am really enjoying all of the challenges of building my career within it.
My favourite partnership that I have worked on was a collaboration with fashion designer Daniel Lismore and Swarovski. Lismore’s designs were brought to life with 50,000 crystals donated by Swarovski, and our national press campaign included articles in Vogue and GQ Magazine. We also held an opening night champagne and cocktail event with VIP guests, including Julian Day, costume designer for the Rocketman movie.

Deciding to join the American Studies programme at the University of Manchester in 2014 was one of the best decisions I have made. I spent three wonderful years on the course, including a semester abroad at North Carolina State University. I believe the skills I learnt on this course set me up brilliantly for the challenges and pressures I have faced as a young graduate trying to get my foot on the career ladder.

After graduating with a First Class joint honors degree in American Studies and History in 2017, I moved to Australia, working in talent acquisition for an investment bank. After two years in Sydney, I moved back to London and I currently am the Partnerships Coordinator for the English National Opera. I work in a small fundraising team, which is responsible for raising over £4 million annually. I oversee account management of all of our partners, including our corporate members, comprised of law firms and financial institutions, and a huge range of other companies, such as MAC Makeup, Laurent-Perrier Champagne, and Hotel Chocolat.

The most exciting part of my role is definitely new business acquisition. I look at the projects and programmes that we have coming up, and will start to research potential companies that I think align with our values, and which would be interested in collaborating with us. As a nonprofit, we are looking for companies to make a financial investment. After collating a detailed prospect list, I will approach key decision makers at these companies and try to secure an invitation to pitch our proposal to their team. Having the skills to write persuasive and engaging pitches, as well as being able to pivot my writing style for the intended audience, is something I learnt on the American Studies course.

Our journey from cultivating prospective to actual partner relies heavily on my ability to network, host events, and steward senior corporate executives. The confidence I developed through speaking in seminars, debates, and presentations during my time at Manchester is instrumental to my success in securing investment for the ENO.

"Deciding to join the American Studies programme at the University of Manchester in 2014 was one of the best decisions I have made."
Ciara Middleton (AS ‘14) is assistant manager of Study Abroad at the University of Leeds

Having graduated with a degree in American Studies six years ago, I have worked my way into senior university administration, and am currently Study Abroad Assistant Manager at the University of Leeds. The primary focus of my role is outbound exchange students: placing them on year-long exchange programmes around the world, supporting them prior to and during their international placements, and easing their return to the UK.

I love my role in the Study Abroad Office. Although it does have an administrative focus, it also involves event management, marketing, social media and networking with international colleagues. In addition to these overall responsibilities, my role also has more specific areas of focus. One of these is the University’s Horizon Year Abroad programme, which allows students to spend a year in Asia, Israel, or Morocco to study intercultural communication and global citizenship with a particular focus on the host country.

I take the lead in selecting students for placements, allocating individual tasks to members of the team so that we ensure as many students as possible are placed, all at suitable destinations, on a year abroad. This is a complex process but we manage to place the majority of students every year. My role also involves supporting students with a disability or long-term health condition who wish to study abroad, and involves working closely with them and their host institutions. Additionally, I oversee all events that are organised for outbound study abroad students throughout the year: from the Study Abroad 101 sessions, addressing those who are just starting the application process; to the wide range of pre-departure events; to the returners’ reflection and employability workshops for students re-adjusting to life back in the UK.

Landing a study abroad role after having studied abroad in the US—for a semester at the University of Massachusetts—was of course no accident. I distinctly remember sitting in my pre-departure meeting at the University of Manchester prior to departing for Amherst, listening intently to the words of a UoM staff member, and thinking “I want that job!” I found the time I spent at UMass among the most rewarding and enriching experience of my degree, which only increased my belief that a job within international mobility must be fulfilling.

After graduating, I returned to my hometown of Leeds and quickly discovered that roles in universities are extremely competitive, particularly exciting jobs in student opportunity. Initially, to gain some income, I became a door-to-door fundraiser for different charities. That experience really improved my confidence and my ability to communicate with ease to people of all backgrounds proved valuable when, seven months after graduating, I got my first job at the University of Leeds as an Administrative Assistant in the Language Centre. From the Language Centre, I moved to Undergraduate Admissions, and then into the Study Abroad Office, admitting and supporting inbound students arriving in Leeds. Since then I have become the Assistant Manager of the team, and the role has offered me some incredible opportunities—from attending conferences across the UK, to delivering a presentation to international colleagues at the Freie University, Berlin. I was also due to complete a tour of study abroad fairs in the major cities of Australia but, because of the pandemic, this will have to wait!

2020 has of course not been an ordinary year and I’ve found myself learning more about crisis management and dealing with uncertainty than anything else! From the Hong Kong protests to the Australian bush fires to the global pandemic, my role requires me to keep a close eye on international incidents in order to support our students internationally. In the future I hope to continue my advancement within international opportunities as I’ve found it to be a hugely rewarding career—though one downside is constantly seeing amazing photos and videos of students in exciting destinations worldwide that gives you an unwavering sense of travel-envy!
Victoria Bilsbury (ELAS ‘14) is the assistant head of English at St. George’s High School, Blackpool

I am currently Assistant Head of the English Faculty at St George’s School, Blackpool. My position involves both supporting and leading my fellow teachers in order to ensure that, as a team, we deliver the highest quality of education possible for our pupils. On a weekly basis, I deliver the National Curriculum from ages 11-16 (Years 7-11) teaching students how to read, write and think like literary students, and secure ambitious GCSEs in the process. The role also involves curriculum design—supporting colleagues with subject knowledge, enhancing their practice and subject knowledge, and leading professional development meetings. I also record and evaluate faculty-wide data to address pupil attainment gaps.

After completing my degree in English Literature and American Studies, I was unsure what career to pursue, my degree having opened up so many doors; I eventually decided on a PGCE in teaching English. This seemed to be the most clear-cut way to ensure my career entailed what I loved: English Literature and American Studies. After embarking on my PGCE at The University of Manchester, I was immediately taken back into the classroom. I loved this aspect of the course due to the parity it had with my own formative years in education. My first placement was at an all-girls school in Sandbach, Cheshire, and I was immediately hooked. Neither myself nor any of my friends or family could quite believe just how much I fell in love with teaching: the creativity, the subject knowledge, the teamwork and most importantly, the pupils. My second placement brought me a little closer to home—an outstanding school in Standish, Wigan. I was surrounded by inspirational peers: practitioners who were inspiring leaders and who, in spite of their exceptional knowledge, were completing Masters and PhDs. This is something that I aspire to in the future as my immersion in education has only served to revitalise my love of learning.

While completing my PGCE, I secured a position as a Teacher of English at Golborne High School, Wigan. This was my first interview and I truly think that my success was based on my passion and enthusiasm for my subject as well as the quality of my degree and subject knowledge—all of which Manchester had made possible. Now more so than ever, expert subject knowledge is highly regarded, and rewarded, within teaching as we prepare and shape the minds of the future. As a result of my degree, and the subject knowledge that I continue to develop after being inspired by my brilliant course lecturers, I have been recognised quite quickly and have secured a series of roles where I have been able to develop other skills, such as leadership and management.

Teaching has inevitable challenges. It is a vocational career choice, and it is very difficult to switch off—but therein lies its beauty. I am able to discuss Shakespeare, debate Maya Angelou, question Sylvia Plath, explore the rhetoric of Malcolm X and compare it with that of Martin Luther King, Jr., or even Obama! Very few other careers would permit me the same experience, and it is my degree that opened this door.

“Very few other careers would permit me the same experience, and it is my degree that opened this door.”

Picture Credit: www.stgeorgesblackpool.com
GOVERNMENT AND PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

Alex Deemer (AS ‘15) is a project manager for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster City Council.

I joined Kensington and Chelsea Council in August 2018, as a Project Manager for the newly-designed Short Breaks Service team. The Short Breaks Service supports children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), providing packages of support including after-school, weekend and holiday activities and home care. I work for a bi-borough service, which consists of over 80 members of staff, across 4 sites.

I work on a wide range of projects, from strategic (service changes), IT (new programs or case management systems), building (site re-fits or improvements), and commissioning (new home care, activity, or disability focused external providers). The role sees me regularly deputizing for the head of service at senior board meetings, lobbying councillors for changes to support SEND children and young people, and being the first point of call for information and requests.

The role gives me amazing variety, and a chance to develop all manner of project-based skills, from leading on projects, to fund raising, and facilitating in a more traditional project manager role. My day-to-day role involves updating the head of service on current projects, ensuring projects are meeting deadlines, setting up meetings for internal staff and suppliers, and chairing meetings. In any week, I’ll also attend Adults Services project groups representing disabled children; complete site visits to check the progress of our building work; and update the service’s long-term strategy, including analyzing data trends (for example, around ages, disabilities, ethnicity) and think how that could impact our future service. Since working in the post, I have completed some further qualifications in Agile PMP to practitioner level, as well as completing Prince 2 practitioner, the basis of any career in project management.

My degree in American Studies was amazingly diverse. The possibilities of module combinations and mediums to learn in was vast—touching on English, History, Geography, Film Studies, Art, Politics, and Economics. The key skills I learned as a result of my degree were the ability to analyze large amounts of information, and the ability to form a cohesive argument. Whatever career you go into, you have to be able to get your point across, learn, teach, and lead. The skills learned through this course enable you to do all these things, and builds your confidence to express yourself and question others.

After leaving university, I worked for Waltham Forest Council, for two years, mostly in a project assistant role within the Education Business Support Service, which gave me a great introduction to project work, and local government. During this time, I also began self-funding my own career training, completing a Prince 2 foundation course. As well as working nights at a local petrol station, I also volunteered at a charity called Bridge Builders and supported them in designing content for an app, which helped young people from low-income families and aimed to provide employment advice and guidance. This opportunity allowed me to sit on a board of extremely knowledge people, and culminated in me presenting my ideas to Dame Janet Trotter DBE.

In the future, I hope to gain greater management experience, with an aim to become a programme manager for a larger portfolio of projects across whole service areas within local government.

“My degree in American Studies was amazingly diverse. The possibilities of module combinations and mediums to learn in was vast.”
Jessica Dick (AS ‘13) is a solicitor at Fieldfisher, Manchester

I graduated from the University of Manchester with a degree in American Studies in 2013, and, amid the coronavirus pandemic, qualified as a solicitor in early 2020. I currently specialize in property litigation for Fieldfisher in Manchester.

It is difficult to describe a “typical day” for a property litigator—you always have a plan but inevitably something urgent crops up. My day often starts by giving the transactional team ad hoc advice on risk management and then dealing with queries from clients that tend to be more complicated than they expect! I also assist several clients with their property asset management. This includes serving break notices to end leases, forfeiture if tenants are failing to pay their rent and dealing with property dilapidations. I build close relationships with a variety of people including clients’ in-house legal teams, property managers and surveyors.

One of the aspects of my job that I find particularly interesting is matters of professional negligence. I would typically get involved if a lease has been improperly drafted and this has caused our client loss. This gives me the chance to draft long letters, setting out my client’s argument to argue the case, which I particularly enjoy. I am involved in graduate recruitment and mentoring as I feel strongly about widening access to the profession. I have a mentee every year, offering them general advice, looking over their CV and checking any job applications they draft.

When I was 18 and deciding what to study at university, I struggled to pick between literature, history, and politics. American Studies gave me the opportunity to study all three areas and to study abroad for a semester too. I had considered doing a law degree but I wanted to study something academically broader, and to undertake work experience following my graduation, before pursuing a law conversion course.

One of the key skills I developed during my degree was my analytical and research skills. As in most humanities degrees, I was required to research and draft numerous essays. This required me to analyse large amounts of information and to pull out the relevant facts and key points. The ability to research detailed points, and write about them concisely, is a skill I use every day as a solicitor.

Studying abroad—in my case at the University of Arizona—also developed other transferable skills that I use as a solicitor. These include being adaptable, and having improved communication skills and cultural awareness. Living and studying in a different culture increased my confidence greatly.

The University of Manchester also has a wide variety of societies and careers guidance that can help you on your chosen career path. I joined the law for non-law society to gain a broader understanding of what a career in law is really like and to learn more about the application process. I also applied for the University’s mentoring programme, Manchester Gold, which connects current students with alumni who work in particular industries, including the law. My mentor gave me invaluable advice on how to pursue a legal career and we have remained in touch since I graduated.

The route to becoming a solicitor is not easy. After completing my legal studies I was a paralegal for two years before commencing my training contract at a large national firm. Throughout, my American Studies degree has been a talking point in my interviews, and I would say that it offered me a well-rounded interesting education, and set me up well for a challenging career in law.

“American Studies gave me the opportunity to study abroad for a semester.”
Tony Scott (HAS ‘19) is a trainee accountant at PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Shortly after graduating in July 2019, I began on the graduate scheme with the financial services firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). Part of the ‘Big 4’ accountancy firms, PwC is an excellent place to start a career in finance. The range of opportunities are unrivalled, and the skills you pick up from an American Studies degree are easily transferable into the work and qualifications offered by the firm.

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I currently sit in the large corporates team in the Manchester office. This primarily revolves around assisting corporate clients with technical tax problems—it is not just filling in tax returns, as some might think! As an associate at the firm, my day-to-day tasks revolve around working with several clients, writing reports, data collection, and running draft calculations or analysis. The position exposes me to a wide variety of tax rules and legislation. I have also been fortunate to work with a wide range of businesses—from local family-run companies, to complex global merger and acquisition deals with clients in New York, London, and India.

As part of the graduate scheme, I am required to study and complete the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales’ (ICAEW) ACA qualification. This is a series of fifteen exams that usually take place over the course of three years, and covers the disciplines of accounting, taxation, management information, and audit methodology. It is by no means an easy task, and I am currently about halfway through the process. However my degree helped me to develop time management skills and gave me a sense of how best I study outside of the classroom. Much like my degree, the ACA qualification relies largely on your own work ethic.

I studied BA History and American Studies from 2016 to 2019, writing a dissertation on the management of urban light-rail projects, particularly in the city of Portland, Oregon. While it seems a far departure from my current career, the degree certainly helped me to secure the initial summer internship, during the second year of my course, and my subsequent position on the graduate scheme. The degree also helped to develop my analytical skills, and, I have found that in the era of big data, this skill has become more important than ever in advisory and managerial roles.

In my department, clients often want answers to difficult tax questions which are situationally unique to them and can’t be answered with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response.

They want you to be able to distil complex legislation, apply it to their situation with references to sources and calculations, and make a judgement on what the best path of action to take is. Contrary to what you might expect, the majority of my department did not do accounting and finance as an undergraduate degree.

While the world of financial services seems far from the humanities, the reality is that companies highly value the transferable ‘soft’ skills that you develop in degrees such as American Studies. It is definitely a career path to consider if you take this degree, as while it is often tough it can lead to a stable career, with financial benefits to match.