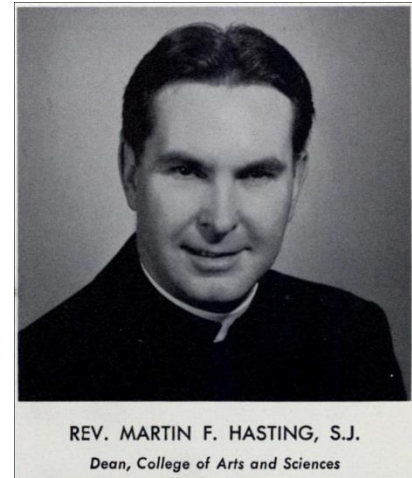


# History of American Studies at Saint Louis University

From its inception, the interdisciplinary endeavor of American Studies has excelled in framing new and exciting questions, expanding the range of sources for research, and devising fresh methodologies for scholarship. The broad contours of the field stretch back to the nineteenth century with the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Ralph Emerson, and John Dewey. In the 1910s and 1920s, critics such as W. E. B. DuBois, Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, and Jane Addams energized a generation of American intellectuals around basic questions of identity, culture, and citizenship in a multiethnic and multiracial society.

American Studies emerged in the 1930s as a movement within the universities, particularly among scholars of American literature and history at Harvard University, Yale University, and the University of Minnesota. Much of this generation's work attempted to examine what practitioners then took to be the exceptional qualities of American society and culture. The first Ph.D. in American Studies was granted in 1940 to Henry Nash Smith at Harvard. During the Cold War, universities grew dramatically in size and scope, and the American Studies enterprise expanded with new sources of government and foundation support.

American Studies at Saint Louis University was founded in this context. It initially took shape as a doctoral program housed in the History Department, as an initiative organized in 1963 by historian Martin F. Hasting (1913–2003) under a federal National Defense Education grant. After serving as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences from 1958 to 1963, Hasting stepped down from the College leadership in order to establish the American Studies graduate curriculum. He continued to play a central role in the burgeoning Ph.D. program until 1969, when he joined Plattsburgh State University in New York, founding a Canadian Studies program there.



Courtesy Saint Louis University Libraries, Archives & Records Management

In 1965, Saint Louis University granted its first American Studies Ph.D. to Albert J. P. McCarthy (1918–1978), an assistant professor in geography at the University. By 1997, one hundred American Studies doctorates had been conferred by the University. To date, Saint Louis University hosts the only American Studies Ph.D. program at a U.S. Jesuit university, and the only such program at a private university anywhere in the eleven-state region of the Mid-America American Studies Association.



Professor Elizabeth Kolmer, ASC (2005)  
Photo courtesy Matthew Mancini

In the 1960s and 1970s, feminism, African American and ethnic studies, and postcolonial theory challenged the American Studies field to incorporate a broader range of voices, and to work for greater inclusion of previously marginalized groups. It was during this period, in 1969, that Sister Elizabeth Kolmer, Ph.D., established American Studies as a freestanding, independent doctoral program at Saint Louis University, no longer under the aegis of any other academic department. As director of the newly autonomous American Studies unit, Professor Kolmer became the first woman ever named to head a degree-granting academic department or program within the College of Arts and Sciences. In 1971, Professor Kolmer launched the Master of Arts program in American Studies, with more than twenty M.A. students earning degrees in the program's first five years. This was followed in 1975 by the establishment of the American Studies undergraduate major. Over the years, many faculty contributed to the program through secondary appointments, creating a cross-disciplinary conversation among Americanists at the University.

As with most humanities fields, American Studies benefited through the 1980s from a deepening critical engagement with issues of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and empire, and was shaped by the growing influence of anthropology, folklore studies, material culture studies, postcolonial studies, and visual culture analysis. Throughout the 1990s, American Studies scholars in the U.S. joined with their colleagues abroad to promote the internationalization of the field. At Saint Louis University, the American Studies unit has been a contributor to this expanding global dialogue, particularly in its support of the Maastricht Centre for Transatlantic Studies in the Netherlands and through its exchange partnership with the American Studies Department at the University of Groningen.

In 1995, American Studies at Saint Louis University obtained department status, with Professor Kolmer serving as the first chairperson. Professor Kolmer's contributions to the field were recognized in 1996, when the Mid-America American Studies Association established its annual Elizabeth Kolmer Award for American Studies advising and service, naming the prize in her honor. In 2004, the department's Kolmer Seminar Room in Adorjan Hall was named in commemoration of Professor Kolmer's four decades of dedicated work as a teacher, mentor, scholar, and administrator in American Studies at Saint Louis University.

In 2000, the University recruited Professor Matthew J. Mancini from Missouri State University to become the American Studies department chairperson. Professor Mancini completed the unit's transformation from its former program configuration into a full-fledged operating department with its own dedicated tenure-track positions and resources. During Professor Mancini's fifteen years of leadership, the department grew to reach six full-time American Studies faculty members, deepened its programming at the graduate and undergraduate levels, and attracted an increasingly competitive national applicant pool for its doctoral degree program. At various points during this span, the department's full-time faculty included scholars such as Heidi Ardizzone, Lawrence Barmann, Candy Brown, Joseph Heathcott, Donna Knaff, Benjamin Looker, Shirley Loui, Emily Lutenski, Katherine Moran, Cindy Ott, Jonathan Smith, Shawn Michelle Smith, Deborah Whaley, and Susanne Wiedemann.



Professor Matthew Mancini (2008)

*Photo courtesy Jay Fram*

In May 2015, in an event at Il Monastero, alumni, retired faculty, and current department members celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the first American Studies Ph.D. granted at SLU. At the gathering, the department and the College of Arts and Sciences established the annual Matthew J. Mancini Award for Outstanding American Studies Dissertation or Thesis, named in honor of outgoing chairperson Matthew Mancini. In a speech on the role of American Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences mission, Dean Michael D. Barber, S.J., told attendees, "American Studies ... pursues and deepens the academic mission of the College to develop self-reflectivity and provides a model of interdisciplinary teaching and research from which the College has much to learn."

Today, faculty in the department are building on the strong foundation of teaching and mentoring established during the 1960s through 2000s by directors and chairs Martin Hasting, Elizabeth Kolmer, and Matthew Mancini, while developing a range of initiatives in research, teaching, public humanities, and professional and community service.

At present, students can pursue American Studies coursework at hundreds of universities and colleges around the nation and world. American Studies benefits from a rich intellectual heritage, and it produces some of the most exciting work in the humanities and social sciences. Like all disciplines, American Studies faces many challenges ahead, but these make for lively times in the field. Here at Saint Louis University, American Studies majors, minors, and graduate students take an active part in meeting these challenges in the classroom and beyond.

## **Directors/Chairs of American Studies at SLU**

1963–1969: Martin F. Hasting, S.J.  
1969–1981: Elizabeth Kolmer, A.S.C.  
1981–1983: Charles E. Marske  
1983–1988: Lawrence F. Barmann  
1988–1995: Elizabeth Kolmer, A.S.C.  
1995–1999: Shirley Loui  
1999–2000: Lawrence F. Barmann  
2000–2015: Matthew J. Mancini  
2015–present: Heidi Ardizzone