

# DePaul American Studies

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## Notes from the Director, Amy Tyson



As I write this Director's note, I'm glancing at today's edition of the *New York Times*. The headlines deal with a recent double escape from a maximum security prison, the forthcoming SCOTUS rulings on same-sex marriages, and the heartbreaking and horrific hate crimes in Charleston, SC. In the Arts section, there is piece on a recent Lady Gaga and Tony Bennett collaboration, a review of an HBO documentary on American gun violence, and coverage of a revival of an African-American opera ('Voodoo') by Harlem Renaissance composer H. Lawrence Freeman.

Scrolling through the headlines while prepping to write these notes, I was struck how the topics—seemingly disparate—were akin to the topics you might find in an American Studies major's “course cart.”

Indeed, this fall AMS students are taking courses about the History of Sex in America (**Jaime Hovey**), Critical Perspectives in Criminal Justice (**Traci Schlesinger**), Mass Incarceration and Public Memory (**Amy Tyson**), Deconstructing the Diva (**Robin Mitchell**), Television and American Identity (**Allison McCracken**), Blackness and American Television (**Kelly Kessler**), American Youth as Social Movement (**Jim Block**), and American Literature Since 1920 (**Billy Gonzalez**)—among others.

In selecting the interdisciplinary electives that form our major, we in American Studies do not merely study what *interests* us about American culture and society, we consciously and creatively prepare ourselves to be

broad-minded, informed, engaged, questioning, and ethical citizens in our complicated, messy, and often heartbreaking world. This notion about American Studies' relevance is echoed in our alumna feature with **Libby Massa**, our student feature with **Peyton Lucey**, and our faculty feature with **Nancy Grossman**, who advises her students not to pick a major for a job, but to “Pick a major for a lifetime.” In these times, sage advice.

-Amy M. Tyson, Ph.D.  
Director, American Studies  
Associate Professor, History

### AMS Program Requirements

- 3 Core Methods Courses (AMS 211, 213 & 215)
- 6 Courses from One of the Five Concentrations
- 3 Electives Courses on U.S. topics, either AMS courses or university courses approved of by the AMS program
- 1 Senior Seminar

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## AMS Program Faculty: Nancy Grossman



**Nancy Grossman**  
**Associate Director of**  
**The Honor's Program**

The American Studies department cooperates with various departments across DePaul in order to expand its reach to students and to develop its coursework. The Honors Program is one of those departments. Nancy Grossman is the Associate Director of the Honor's Program at DePaul, an American Studies Program Committee member, and a young adult fiction author. She has been working at DePaul for over 27 years and is committed to enhancing the college experience for DePaul Honors students.

Nancy grew up in a Northern suburb of Chicago and was a first generation college student. She did not always intend to pursue a career in an academic setting. She was interested in sociology while pursuing her undergraduate studies and received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Social Work from the University of Illinois. However, when she started working in the field, she realized it was not a good fit for her. Since Nancy always loved writing, she decided to take a fiction writing class at Columbia College. She pursued further classes, continued working as a social worker while taking night classes, and received a Master's degree in the Teaching of Writing.

Around the same time she was finishing her second Masters degree, Nancy interviewed at DePaul for a part-time teaching position. She earned the position and began teaching at DePaul as a part-time faculty member in the English Department where she taught rhetoric courses part-time at DePaul beginning in 1987. In 2002, Nancy was invited to apply for the Assistant Director position in the Honors Program.

As the current Associate Director of the Honors Program, Nancy advises students who are in the colleges of LAS (including AMS students), CSH, Education, Music, and Theater. She also works with student life programming, oversees the mentor program, aims to make the Honors Program a scholarly community, oversees the academic components of the Honors Program to ensure that the Honors courses coincide with degree requirements in students' academic programs, and reviews admissions for the Honors Program. Her favorite part of working with the Honors Program is advising. Nancy works with students who come into DePaul as Undeclared in order to facilitate their selection of a major. In addition she does ongoing academic planning with students; thus, she assists students who want to change their major, add a minor, add a second major, want to study abroad, or are struggling with personal or academic issues.

The Honors Program is for students who are seeking greater challenges in the Liberal Studies portion of their degree program. Students who have been successful at DePaul and want to be a part of a scholarly community and take challenging courses can go to the Honors Program office to pick up a transfer application. Students who are early in their academic career and haven't completed many of their liberal studies requirements can join right in and assume the full Honors set of requirements.

Students who are farther along in their program can apply to the Honors Associate Program and they still have the full range of Honors Co-Curricular programming available to them which include: Mentor program, Honors Student Government, Honors Newsletter, Lecture series, Student-Faculty dinners, and Cultural Outings. For more information on the Honors Program please visit their website at:

<http://academic.depaul.edu/honors>

In addition to the work she does with the Honors Program, Nancy is on the American Studies Committee in order to find ways to draw Honors students into the AMS program. Nancy also served as a judge for the DeCordova Essay Competition. This is her second year of her affiliation with AMS..

*I always recommend American Studies to students who are undeclared but have a lot of diverse interests. And I present it as a program that brings together so many different disciplines: political science, literature, art history, communication.*

Nancy often tells her AMS Honors students that when her son was visiting prospective universities, they went to the University of Virginia. He was particularly keen on majoring in Journalism, but they soon discovered that the university did not have a Journalism or Communications program. They were baffled because Katie Couric graduated from the University of Virginia and pursued a journalism career. When they pulled up her bio, they found that Katie Couric had majored in American Studies.

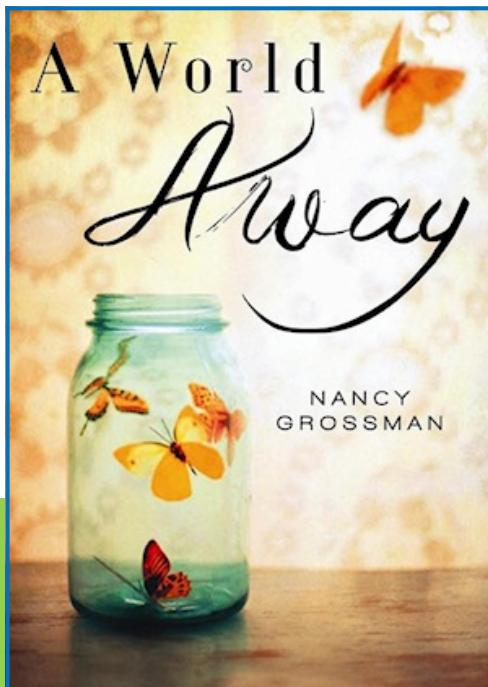
***I always tell students: don't major in a job, because what if you don't like that job? Pick a major for a lifetime.***

## Nancy Grossman, continued

So when a student makes that brave choice to be in a major that does not have an exact job that's waiting at the end, I like them to know that these majors give you the skills to work in a variety of jobs, not just one job. I always tell students: don't major in a job, because what if you don't like that job? Pick a major for a lifetime.

Nancy has cultivated this outlook in her own life and transformed her love of reading and writing into a career as a young adult fiction author. Nancy remembers wishing she had books to read about young adults when she was a teenager, but would only ever find them on a single bookshelf at the library. There were children's books and adult books but almost nothing in between. She was in Junior High when *The Outsiders* came out, which was written and marketed for a teen audience and broke through this barrier.

Nancy was inspired to write her first novel when she took a trip with two high school friends as part of their yearly tradition: every fall they meet in a different city. That year they met in Lancaster, Pennsylvania to explore a small Amish town. While visiting, they were invited to an Amish family's house for dinner. Nancy had a wonderful conversation with the family's 14 year old daughter about books and reading. This encounter sparked the concept for her first published novel: *A World Away*.



*A World Away* is about a young girl who is on the verge of *rumspringa*, a time for Amish adolescents to engage the modern world in order to decide whether they want to be baptized into the Amish religion or leave the community. The young girl in Nancy's story is visited by a woman from the modern world who invites her to work as a nanny. She experiences technology and forbidden love for the first time and must decide which world she wants to choose. *A World Away* was published in July of 2012. It is no longer being printed, but is available via audiobook and E-book.

*Before the book came out, a bookstore near my house had a Summer Reading event where they hosted me and a couple of other authors. This bookstore got a bunch of copies of the advance reader's copy from the publisher and had all these kids come, and they gave them each a little tote bag with different books in it. After we each did our readings, all the children came with their books to be signed. And I had never had that experience before. All of a sudden, I'm looking up and there is a line of girls clutching my book, waiting in line for me to sign it. It was an unbelievable feeling.*

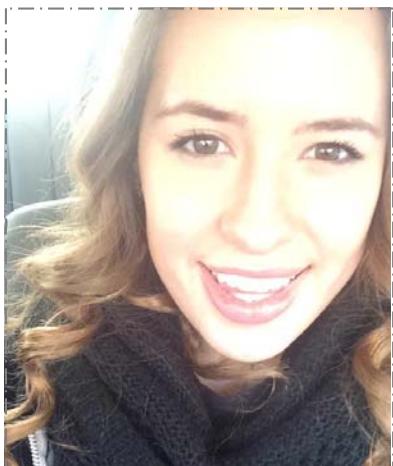
Nancy is looking forward to publishing her second book called *The Almost Sister*. She is currently working on her third book titled *Missing Mother*, about a teenage girl whose mother left when she was 7. When she is 16 she finds out that her mother has been in prison. Nancy is doing careful research on the prison system in order to write this book, and visited a woman's prison last month. The play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder is also an essential aspect of the book, so she is researching theater and stage productions.

Nancy provided the following advice for young writers:

*Read a lot in the genre you want to write in. If you're writing plays, read a lot of plays. If you're writing mysteries, read a lot of mysteries. Write a lot, but don't beat yourself up about it. Whatever you do is good. The ideal is to just keep writing and write every day, but that's not reality for most of us. So whatever you're able to write, reward yourself on that. Also, find a peer group. If you find a group of other*



## Student Perspective: Peyton Lucey



### Student Perspective: Peyton Lucey, Class of 2016

American Studies major Peyton Lucey is nearing the end of her junior year at DePaul. She has a concentration in Material Culture and the Built Environment and is minoring in Studio Art. She was drawn to American Studies for reasons that most majors have in common: a multitude of interests and a desire to mold their major. Peyton is from Denver, Colorado. She went to the Denver School of the Arts from 6-12<sup>th</sup> grade and majored in dance. She always knew that she wanted to pursue a career in the arts because she loved growing up in a liberal community, but did not want to continue in dance. When she was exploring ideas for undergraduate studies, she developed an interest in Art Therapy. She was told that DePaul had an Art Therapy program and was eager to explore Chicago since her mother often visited for business trips.

When Peyton was at her DePaul orientation, she found out that the Art Therapy program only applied to graduate students, so she had to explore alternate options.

Peyton remained Undeclared until her sophomore year. She dabbled in various courses including Psychology and Communications, but did not feel like she was thoroughly invested in her work. She visited her Academic Advisor who recommended she major in American Studies minor in Studio Art. He explained that the program engages extensively with all the students, and that it would provide her with a strong track toward her ultimate goal of attending graduate school.

Once she began taking courses, she realized that American Studies had the best of everything she was looking for: communications, history, and media.

Her first American Studies course was the **AMS 200**, the required History Sequence course, with Professor Burton. She also took **AMS 340 – American Popular Culture**, with **Allison McCracken**, which has been one of her favorite classes thus far. This class focused on popular culture from the 1890s to the 1930s. They discussed flappers, the minstrel era, the rise of celebrity culture and the concepts of their scandals.

Peyton's final paper for this course discussed certain sexualized images of women like flappers and showgirls. She analyzed these images in reference to celebrities who later became powerful icons of sexuality and race; then she concluded by depicting how the power that these women enforced essentially revolutionized the definition of marriage. This type of analysis is one of Peyton's favorite parts of American Studies.

*You're never done and that's what's frustrating. Yeah, I just used eight sources but I could also use eight more. But it's also really fun when you can connect so many different pieces of work on so many different things to find a meaning; that's really exciting for me.*

Peyton has even been able to study one of her idols, the dancer Josephine Baker. She feels she can still be involved with her past as a dance major and have her courses tie in with that. She also took **Deconstructing the Diva** with **Robin Mitchell** which has completely altered the way she reflects on the concept of "the Diva."

*The best part of AMS is the idea that you can look at everything analytically, in ways you can deeply and personally understand. I feel like your own context plays into this major more than others. How do all these things affect us?*

# A O Pi

Last year, Peyton joined the Sorority Alpha Omicron Pi where she holds the position of Chapter Secretary. As secretary, she is in charge of the role and minutes for chapter meetings, keeping an updated roster and register, and tracking letters and general correspondence between chapters. Alpha Omicron Pi has been a part of DePaul for 19 years. The members of this sorority pursue degrees in a variety of majors and participate in a number of clubs and organizations across campus. Since their philanthropy is arthritis, they host an event called "Spike Out Arthritis" in order to collect funds for the Arthritis Foundation. In addition, they've organized "Ruby Fun Talent Show," "Sisters for Soldiers," "Relay for Life," and participate in "DemonTHON." In April of this year, Alpha Omicron Pi presented "Consent is Power," a discussion with Speakers Anna Nettie Hanson and Steve Adler. The discussion focused on consent and sexual violence; it was presented in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month.



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## Peyton Lucey, continued



After graduation, Peyton is planning on going to graduate school for Art Therapy. She is looking into different internship programs at the moment like "The Art Room." She wants to focus on helping elementary school children cope emotionally through artistic expression.

*I always felt that no one tells you how to be when you're a kid. When you have emotions, you don't know what to do. There are some children who don't have any sort of guide for expression. They don't know that there are other ways of being angry or sad – you can paint and feel better. That's basically what I want to do. I want to help kids.*

**DEMON**  
**THON**

### Alumna Teaching Highlight: Libby Massa

American Studies provides students with a multitude of skills thereby allowing them to pursue a variety of fields after graduation. This quarter, we want to provide insight into the experience of AMS alumna who have moved into the teaching profession. Libby Massa graduated from DePaul in 2012. She double majored in American Studies (with a concentration in Politics, Institutions, and Values) and Women's and Gender Studies (with a concentration in Social Justice and Public Policy). She is now participating in a two-year Teach for American program. She responded to a few questions included below:



#### How did you know you wanted to pursue a career in teaching?

When I was a sophomore at DePaul, I participated in a Service Learning internship through the Women's and Gender Studies department's program Take Back the Halls. Over the course of the year, I planned and facilitated lessons on violence prevention and restorative justice as part of an after school program at a Chicago Public High School. This experience was eye opening to me because I worked with so many talented and driven students who were not given the opportunity to realize their full potential. Around the same time I found out about Teach for America and knew that it was what I wanted to pursue when I graduated because it would allow me the opportunity actively provide those opportunities to students. After graduation I was accepted into Teach for America and taught Kindergarten at a

#### What are you up to currently, and what are your plans for the future?

Currently I work for St. Louis Public Schools in the Office of Institutional Advancement. My responsibilities comprise mainly of volunteer coordination, partnership facilitation, and teacher recognition. Ideally I will continue to work for a public school district in St. Louis to advance the resources for our students.

#### How do you feel American Studies prepared you for your teaching career?

As an AMS and WGS major I was prepared with the right mindsets and research, but not necessarily technical teaching skills. Still, having the right framework to understand institutional inequalities and systematic oppression that influenced the lives of my students daily was invaluable in the classroom. Additionally, as an AMS major I made sure to research the history of public education- particularly pertaining to St. Louis and the political landscape that influenced the current state of education in St. Louis and trends nationally.

#### How would you recommend AMS to undergraduates?

I would recommend it to all students who are self-motivated and naturally curious. I was very indecisive about which major to declare - I went between Political Science, History, Sociology, English, Geography, Film Studies, and many more, unable to commit to any. Once I stumbled upon AMS I realized that it would give me the opportunity to pursue all of my interests. I think any student who has a variety of interests and loves learning for learning's sake would benefit from majoring in AMS.



## What drew you to American Studies? Profiling a few of our AMS majors and minors!



**Amy Hildebrand**  
Major: American Studies

American Studies is, to me, the perfect combination of all the potential majors I had juggled with prior to the start of college. I didn't quite fit into the Sociology, History, Public Policy, or Pre-Law realms. The cross-curricular nature of AMS is what hooked me. I think that switching into AMS was one of the best decisions I have ever made. I feel like I'm on a path that is going to expand my knowledge by challenging me both inside and out of the classroom. I am excited to see what the next three years will be like!

Last quarter (Winter) I took my first AMS class which was the **American Experience from 1860-1941** which persuaded me to switch my major from Public Policy to AMS. I would recommend AMS to other students who are interested in various aspects of American society as well as those undecided yet passionate about their interests in a liberal arts centered education. For those coming to DePaul with interest in politics, activism, popular culture, and the arts, AMS is a good option!

**Megan Pietz**  
Major: Pre-Secondary Education/Honors Program  
Minor: American Studies

I decided to declare a minor in American Studies because one of my favorite English teachers in high school said that if she could go back to school for anything, it would be to get a Masters in American Studies. Seeing that I am a pre-service high school English teacher, the inherent interdisciplinary aspect of American Studies is perfect for me because I get to immerse myself in so many great texts and methods to view them with. Essentially, American Studies allows me to bring a well-rounded body of knowledge to my students when we approach American literature and to study our country's history from unique perspectives.

I have taken two American Studies courses so far: **AMS 215** and **HST 269**. **HST 269** was an incredible course on public history taught by **Dr. Amy Tyson** and I had the chance to learn about aspects of American history, like the Braceros program and the Pruitt-Igoe housing project, that I had previously not known about while I learned how and why exhibits are put together the way they are. In **Dr. McCracken's** section of AMS 215, I was able to apply my new knowledge of American Studies methods while looking at immigration and migration narratives, the history of women, social spaces, and public memory. I am excited to take more courses as I continue in my time at DePaul.



**Pamela Nehrke**, Graduating Spring 2015  
Major: Psychology  
Minor: American Studies

I declared the American Studies minor after taking the Kennedy focal point class with Professor **James Brask** at the end of my freshman year. I had always loved this period of American History, but this focal point class grabbed my attention and helped me realize how easy it would be to obtain a minor in a subject that I truly enjoyed learning about.

My favorite American Studies course would either be the **Kennedy Presidency focal point** or **American Autobiographies**. Both classes contained stimulating readings in which I looked forward to completing more so than in other classes. I also enjoyed and learned a lot from Professor Brask's Vietnam War class.



I am a psychology major and am very excited to have been hired as a research assistant for Dr. **Leonard Jason** in DePaul's Center for Community Research. I will begin this job after graduation and look forward to learning a lot about myself and the field so that I can apply to clinical psychology PhD programs in the coming years.

**Nikki Camp** - Graduating Spring 2015Major: HistoryMinor: American Studies

The story of how I finally found the AMS minor is interesting. I bounced around from minor to minor. I did everything from Italian to business. I finally decided that AMS would be a great fit for me after I saw some of the classes being offered in the department. I'm a big TV watcher, so I was hoping to take a class that could benefit from my excessive television watching. I gained a new way of looking at history. I've been sitting in class rooms learning about the same events in history for most of my school career. Since those classes are usually taught by history professors, they are taught in a very specific way. American Studies encouraged me to look at the "other" point of view, because all events have two sides. Both sides deserve to be studied equally.

I really enjoyed AMS 213 (the American Experience) because it was so small and **Allison McCracken** is an amazing professor. She really encourages the students thinking and acknowledges all points of view. That class dealt with a period of American history that is easily my least favorite to learn about, but the way the class was taught, and the assignments given were able to peak my interest in new ways.

After graduation, I am taking some time off. I'm going to try and find a job working in a museum, and then in January I will hopefully begin a graduate school program for Library and Information Sciences. I'm also hoping to fit in some travel.

**AMS students continued...**

## Congratulations to deCordova Scholarship winner, Clelia Sweeney for her essay, "Probing the Public Wound: The Serial Killer Character in True-Crime Media"

The American Studies Program at DePaul University sponsors the Richard deCordova Scholarship competition to honor and celebrate our late, beloved colleague, a founding member of the American Studies Program, and one of the Program's most loyal supporters. In keeping with Richard deCordova's teaching and scholarly interests, and with his own standards of excellence, papers or projects in U. S. American Studies or U. S. film studies by currently enrolled DePaul undergraduates are eligible for the scholarship. Projects are judged on adequate documentation, originality, interdisciplinary commitment, clarity of reasoning, and clarity of writing. Submissions are accepted online, annually. Next year, we will be accepting submissions at the beginning of Winter quarter 2016. Thanks to **Paul Booth**, **Amy Tyson**, and **Nancy Grossman** for their work on the deCordova prize committee this year!



From left to right: Amy Halloran, Clelia Sweeney, Cynthia Marrero-Ramos., and Prof. Amy Tyson (Director, AMS)

Three students were awarded deCordova honorable mentions: **Amy Halloran** for her essay "Commodification of Irish 'Culture' through a Post-modern Lens"; **Zoe Krey**, for her essay "What's Wrong with the 99 Percent?: The Failure of the Occupy Movement in the United States"; and **Cynthia Marrero-Ramos**, for her essay "Silencing Helga Crane." Clelia Sweeney's essay will be published in the College of Liberal Arts' student journal: *Students Creating Knowledge*. Incidentally, Clelia was also honored for academic achievement as **Outstanding American Studies Senior**.

At our annual **Spring Luncheon**, AMS students, staff, and faculty joined together during the to celebrate the award winners, and also to give a warm farewell to the American Studies majors and minors who graduated, or who would shortly be graduating—in 2014-2015. We were delighted that **Mallory Ewart, Shannon Faulise, Molly McVay, Pamela Nehrke**, and **Clelia Sweeney**—all AMS seniors or recent graduates—were able to join us for this occasion.