

American Studies in the UK, 2000-2010

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American Studies in the UK, 2000-2010

1. Introduction

1.1. Project Overview

Media coverage of American Studies in the UK during the decade 2000 to 2010 often focused, in rather simplistic terms, on the subject's perceived decline, a decline which was often read as a reaction to American foreign policy in the period.¹

However, a detailed analysis of the development of American Studies in the early twenty-first century produces a much more complex picture. Consider, as a starting-point, the following four statements by leading members of the American Studies community in the UK and beyond, all of which were made in response to this project:

“My experience of research and teaching in American Studies over the past decade has been very positive. Institutional and national policy and structural changes have, in the end, meant very little.”
(Simon Newman)

“I have the highest admiration for American Studies in the UK. [...] The kinds of questions British scholars of American Studies are asking, and the approaches they take to answering them are strikingly fresh and interesting.” (Shelley Fisher Fishkin)

“Interest in America amongst students has increased. Interest in American Studies amongst students has declined.” (Iwan Morgan)

“People say the problem with American Studies was Bush, but we'd had Nixon and Reagan in the past.” (Judie Newman)

It is clear, then, that a range of factors – including intellectual trends, economic fluctuations, changes in higher education policy, shifting institutional priorities, and personal experiences – must all be taken into account when assessing the undoubted changes seen in American Studies in the UK between 2000 and 2010. Furthermore, a variety of issues – including the number of undergraduates enrolled on degree courses, the vibrancy of postgraduate study, the development of new research centres and organisations, and the strengths and weaknesses of British scholarship – must all be assessed to gain a broad understanding of the health of American Studies.

Paul Giles identifies the primary tension in American Studies in the 1990s and 2000s as existing between “the intellectual development of the subject on the one hand and its institutional consolidation on the other.” Utilising 14 new interviews, 16 written submissions, and a range of additional data and commentary, this report endeavours to examine both how American Studies was reconsidered intellectually in the first decade of

¹ See, for example: Polly Toynbee, ‘A Degree in Bullying and Self-interest? No Thanks’, *The Guardian*, 25 August 2004; Jessica Shepherd, ‘UCAS Data Give Hope to Troubled Subjects’, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 27 October 2006; William Lee Adams, ‘American Studies: Stars and Gripes’, *Time*, 15 October 2008.

the twenty-first century and how its leading institutions, organisations and publications changed, too. The report does not seek to be a comprehensive account of all these issues; rather, its objective is to contribute to a wider debate about the historical and institutional development of the discipline in the UK and to provide a resource document for future researchers.

1.2. Key Findings

- There was a 19.7% increase in the number of students enrolled on American Studies courses in the UK between 1996/1997 and 2001/2002. This was followed by a 36.7% reduction in student numbers between 2002/2003 and 2010/2011.
- Applications for American Studies increased by 21.6% in 2009. However, this trend must be seen in the context of other increases in related subjects and overall university applications.
- The number of departments offering American Studies degree courses has fallen in recent years. At the same time, modules on American topics remain popular with students and important new research and teaching centres have opened.
- Definitions of American Studies and the composition of attendant degree programmes are changing. Transnationalism has become a key critical term, though its impact and importance remain the subject of much debate.
- National mechanisms for measuring research quality have failed to fully account for the work produced by British scholars in American Studies.
- The British Association for American Studies has broadened its activities, alongside a significant growth in other organisations focused on specific areas of American Studies.
- There remains a distinct gender imbalance in some aspects of American Studies scholarship, with, for example, over two-thirds of articles published in *Journal of American Studies* between 2000 and 2010 written by men.

1.3. Quotations

All quotations in this report derive from interviews conducted by the author between April 2011 and April 2012, written submissions to the report, or events associated with the project, unless otherwise attributed. A detailed list of project sources can be found at the end of the report.

2. American Studies Programmes

2.1. Student Numbers

Throughout the last decade, there has been a great deal of concern over the number of students entering American Studies degree programmes. In particular, there have been two major catalysts for discussion.

Firstly, the impact on American Studies of undergraduate tuition fees, initially introduced for the academic year 1998/1999 (at £1000 per year), subsequently increased for 2006/2007 (to £3000 per year) and reorganised with further increases for 2012/2013, has been much debated. Iwan Morgan states, “American Studies declined because students had to pay for their education.” Students therefore took “a strategic view of jobs” and made “instrumental” decisions concerning their degree choice. Catherine Morley agrees: “without a doubt, the introduction of tuition fees will have had a significant effect on all ‘studies’ disciplines (hence the decline in Film Studies, Media Studies, etc.). Students are increasingly turning to more traditional subjects in selecting university courses (clearly encouraged to do so by parents and schools).”

Secondly, there has been considerable discussion over the impact of the decade’s political events – principally 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the election of Barack Obama – on both undergraduate admissions to American Studies programmes and wider perceptions of the discipline. Michael Collins, who began his undergraduate degree at the University of Nottingham in 2002, says, “9/11 encouraged my application for American Studies. It was a rich time to come into American Studies and created a lot of passionate young people in the discipline.” However, Philip Davies talks of “an overlay of disillusion” caused by American foreign policy in this period. “Some people found it less fun teaching American Studies because of Iraq,” he states. Susan Castillo feels that while George W. Bush’s Presidency and the Iraq War meant American Studies was “no longer perceived as cool,” there was no noticeable decline in student interest in the discipline. Several respondents have pointed out that unpopular instances of American foreign policy in the past, such as the Vietnam War, have stimulated interest in American Studies, rather than harmed it. Thus, the connections between American foreign policy and American Studies are rather more complex than they might initially appear.

The very nature of American Studies degree programmes, which are often taught across several departments and in many different formations, makes statistical data on them difficult to source and to interpret. The fact that many modules in American history, literature or politics are taught as part of other degree programmes means a clear picture of the discipline’s popularity is frequently obscured.

Nonetheless, data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) does offer a useful guide to how American Studies has developed in recent times. Table 1 supports a commonly held assumption outlined by Martin Halliwell: “It is clear that the 1990s was a boom for American Studies recruitment, and this continued into 2001.” HESA figures indicate that there was a 19.7% increase in the number of students enrolled on American Studies courses in the UK between 1996/1997 and 2001/2002. The slight dip in numbers between 1998 and 2000 may be attributed to the initial introduction of tuition fees.

Table 1: HESA Figures for Students on American Studies Courses, 1996-2002²

Year	Total Number of Students in Higher Education Enrolled on American Studies Courses	Percentage Change Year on Year	Undergraduate American Studies Students	Postgraduate American Studies Students
1996/1997	2457		2180	277
1997/1998	2679	+ 9.0%	2417	262
1998/1999	2706	+ 1.0%	2401	305
1999/2000	2560	- 5.4%	2270	300
2000/2001	2635	+ 2.9%	2315	320
2001/2002	2940	+ 11.6%	2585	355

Note: from 1999/2000 onwards, HESA figures have been rounded to the nearest 0 or 5 (hence the occasional irregularities between totals and sub-totals).

From 2002/2003 onwards, the coding of subjects by HESA was changed, which makes it impossible to compare later figures with those from an earlier period. In particular, it should be noted that the subsequent figures for American Studies seen in Table 2 now include students enrolled on Latin American language, literature and culture courses. However, these figures, like those in Table 1, continue to exclude students enrolled on distinct degree programmes in American History or American Politics.

² Source: <http://www.hesa.ac.uk>.

Table 2: HESA Figures for Students on American Studies Courses, 2002-2011³

Year	Total Number of Students in Higher Education Enrolled on American Studies Course	Percentage Change Year on Year	Undergraduate American Studies Students	Postgraduate American Studies Students
2002/2003	4575		4065	510
2003/2004	4430	- 3.2%	3955	480
2004/2005	4050	- 8.6%	3630	420
2005/2006	3940	- 2.7%	3510	430
2006/2007	3580	- 9.1%	3145	430
2007/2008	3195	- 10.8%	2895	300
2008/2009	2985	- 6.6%	2650	330
2009/2010	2920	- 2.2%	2590	330
2010/2011	2895	- 0.9%	2590	310

Note: From 2007/2008 onwards, HESA data excludes students on sabbatical and entering writing-up status (hence the immediate decline in postgraduate numbers).

Here, a 36.7% reduction in student numbers can be identified between 2002/2003 and 2010/2011. That the reduction in numbers begins to slow dramatically in the latter years of the decade seems to give credence to a theory, often anecdotally expressed, that American Studies enjoyed an ‘Obama bounce’ in the wake of the 2008 Presidential election.⁴ However, in order to analyse that trend in more detail, another set of figures – this time from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) – is useful to consider (Table 3).

³ Source: <http://www.hesa.ac.uk>.

⁴ See, for example, ‘News in Brief’, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 19 March 2009.

Table 3: UCAS Figures for Applications for American Studies Courses, 2006-2011⁵

Year	Applications for American Studies	Acceptances for American Studies	Ratio of Applications to Acceptances	Percentage Change in Applications Year on Year
2006	2878	544	5.3	
2007	2559	519	4.9	- 11.1%
2008	2204	554	4.0	- 13.9%
2009	2679	496	5.4	+ 21.6%
2010	2849	538	5.3	+ 6.3%
2011	2884	502	5.7	+ 1.2%

These figures seem to substantiate the notion of an ‘Obama bounce’. Two years of substantial decline in American Studies applications were followed in 2009 by an increase of 21.6%. Subsequent figures also suggest a consolidation of the discipline after a lean period (perhaps sparked by the introduction of ‘top-up’ fees) between 2006 and 2008, a trend supported by admissions data from individual departments. In addition, some observers have mentioned staff losses and institutional restrictions on the number of modules and students as causes for the fall in admissions between 2006 and 2008. Overall, application figures for 2006 and 2011 are almost identical.

However, the picture is complicated when these figures are compared with those for English, History and Politics (Table 4), the three disciplines most commonly related to American Studies. In 2008, applications to all four disciplines, as well as overall applications to all degree courses in the UK, were in decline, though American Studies suffered the most prominent dip. Moreover, applications to all four disciplines, as well as overall applications to all degree courses, then rose substantially in 2009, though again the movement was much more pronounced in American Studies. Hence, the ‘Obama bounce’ must be seen in the light of much broader developments in higher education. What must also be borne in mind here is the much smaller number of applicants for American Studies courses (around 2,500 annual applications) compared to English and History (both enjoying around 50,000 applications a year) and Politics (25-35,000 applications a year). Thus, even small fluctuations in admissions numbers are felt much more strongly in percentage terms in American Studies.

⁵ Source: <http://www.ucas.com>.

Table 4: UCAS Figures for Applications for American Studies, English, History, and Politics Courses, 2007-2011⁶

Year	Applications for American Studies	Applications for English	Applications for History	Applications for Politics	Overall UCAS Applications
2007	- 11.1%	+ 6.4%	+ 2.9%	+ 5.2%	+ 6.3%
2008	- 13.9%	- 8.9%	- 6.5%	- 6.5%	- 6.8%
2009	+ 21.6%	+ 6.5%	+ 8.0%	+ 17.1%	+ 8.7%
2010	+ 6.3%	+ 6.3%	+ 5.5%	+ 14.5%	+ 14%
2011	+ 1.2%	- 5.1%	+ 0.6%	+ 8.7%	+ 4.7%

In light of increasing tuition fees, Ian Scott outlines the changing nature of teaching and learning at the University of Manchester: “We now spend a lot of time thinking about student expectations, which were taken for granted in the past. We have to structure, identify and provide a rationale for our expectations and their expectations. We have to consider why universities are here and what they’re for. Departments who don’t pay attention to it will suffer – there’s too much comeback.”

2.2. Departmental Developments

In 1999, at least 46 departments in the UK were known to be providing American Studies courses.⁷ That year, Mick Gidley remarked: “After the long retrenchment of the 1980s and the market-led expansion of the 1990s, I feel that interdisciplinary American Studies is institutionally quite buoyant.”⁸ Applications, however, had been falling for some time: from 1996 to 1999, the total number of American Studies single honours applicants declined by 25.8%, while the total number of acceptances declined by 5.4%.⁹ By the end of 2005, departmental numbers had been significantly reduced, to around 27 single honours programmes in American Studies amongst 40 UK providers of the subject at undergraduate level.¹⁰ By 2010, the total number of departments providing

⁶ Source: <http://www.ucas.com>.

⁷ British Association for American Studies, Executive Committee Minutes, No. 220 (26 June 1999).

⁸ ‘Forum: American Studies at the Millennium – Some Thoughts’, in *American Studies in Britain*, Issue 81 (Autumn/Winter 1999).

⁹ Philip Davies, ‘Recruitment Patterns in American Studies’, in *American Studies in Britain*, Issue 82 (Spring/Summer 2000).

¹⁰ Martin Halliwell, ‘The Future of Interdisciplinary Area Studies’, in *American Studies in Britain*, Issue 94 (Spring 2006).

American Studies at undergraduate level had been further reduced, to (at best) 32, with far fewer offering a single honours programme.¹¹

There is no doubt that during the decade many American Studies departments, such as well-respected programmes at Keele University, Lancaster University and the University of Sheffield, suffered institutional problems, if not outright closure in some cases. Other programmes, however, such as those at the University of Birmingham, the University of East Anglia, the University of Leicester, the University of Manchester (where American Studies and its associated programmes are the most heavily subscribed of all degree programmes in the entire institution), and the University of Nottingham, have thrived.

There has been particular concern over the progress of American Studies in post-1992 universities, after the closure of departments at De Montfort University in 2007, and at the University of Wolverhampton and the University of Northampton at the end of the decade. Graham Thompson has pointed out that “recruitment problems clearly impact most severely on post-1992 universities who are not insulated by the kudos and status more venerable institutions retain.”¹² Heidi Macpherson confirms that “if you have a greater resource base and funding, you can ride out fluctuations.” However, a lack of critical mass at newer institutions has meant American Studies has primarily been a feature at module level, though the subject is currently undergoing significant expansion at Northumbria University. In addition, since the pathway in American Studies at Queen’s University Belfast was suspended in 2004 and then withdrawn altogether in 2008, the University of Ulster has provided the only undergraduate American Studies pathway in Northern Ireland. However, undergraduate recruitment to American modules in film, history and literature remains healthy in several institutions in Northern Ireland.

Anxieties concerning recruitment and departmental decline have remained a constant feature of discussions within the American Studies community throughout the UK in this period. Dick Ellis states that there has been a “fundamental shift away from discrete, autonomous American Studies departments” so that American Studies staff are now “scattered” throughout different departments and schools. For Ellis, American Studies is now about “servicing other disciplines.” This reflects the continued success of modules in American history, literature and politics that are hosted by other departments, as well as the continuity of American Studies degree programmes outside of dedicated departments. At the University of Sussex, for example, the highly-rated American Studies department was closed in 2010 after institutional restructuring, with staff relocated to the Schools of English and History, Art History, and Philosophy. Nevertheless, the 2011 intake for American Studies was the largest cohort on record at Sussex. Brian Ward confirms that “American-based modules have never been so popular in universities across Britain.” Heidi Macpherson was aware of the historical continuity this trend represents when she was Chair of BAAS: “American Studies has always extended beyond its boundaries, with American Studies research being carried out in most UK universities, though not always under an explicit American Studies banner.”¹³

¹¹ Illustrating how statistics detailing departmental provision fluctuate between different sources, in 2009 *The Guardian University Guide* listed 19 institutions offering American Studies, *The Times Good University Guide* listed 25, and *The Complete University Guide* online listed 30.

¹² Graham Thompson, ‘Editorial’, in *American Studies in Britain*, Issue 89 (Autumn 2003).

¹³ Heidi Macpherson, ‘Chair’s Report’ (28 March 2008), in *American Studies in Britain*, Issue 99 (Autumn 2008).

Does the reduction in distinct American Studies departments matter if interdisciplinary work on American topics continues elsewhere? This has been one of the central questions for the community throughout the decade. Subarno Chattarji summarises the dilemma: “the disaggregating of specific departmental spaces for the field represents both the promise of greater interdisciplinarity and the threat of dissolution or invisibility.” Interdisciplinary departments have proved both expensive to run (in terms of journal subscriptions, for example), but also inexpensive to close (because staff can be easily redeployed in other, larger departments). Furthermore, there may be, as Paul Giles comments, intellectual advantages to a different departmental model: “it is noticeable how few members of the American Studies Association (ASA) in the United States actually belong to an American Studies department. [...] This has arguably allowed US Americanists greater freedom to respond positively to the kind of fluidity of borders, both geographic and conceptual, that has characterized the methodological impetus of transnationalism over the past ten years.”

2.3. Outreach Programmes

In her 2007 article on sixth-form awareness of American Studies, Hannah Lowe reported that over half of the students questioned had not heard of the subject, while many others had only vague conceptions of it. Her report recommended increasing “non-traditional” students’ knowledge of American Studies, targeting Humanities students in particular, and ensuring that studying abroad in the United States would not cause additional financial burdens.¹⁴ Throughout the last decade, there have been many innovative outreach programmes designed to increase interest in American Studies amongst school children and sixth-formers, with the BAAS Teachers’ Representative continuing to act as a conduit between higher education and secondary schools.

Since 2003, the Congress to Campus programme has held a series of highly successful UK events in which retired Congressmen talk to school children at university venues. The programme is organised by the Eccles Centre at the British Library with the support of the US Embassy. The autumn series now attracts over a thousand participants, while the spring series attracts around 500 attendees.

One explicit response to concerns about falling admissions numbers was the production and distribution of the CD *Discover American Studies* in 2007. The CD was developed by Sara Wood and colleagues at the University of Birmingham and the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, with funding from the US Embassy. BAAS bought 20,000 copies of the CD to distribute to interested institutions and the material also provided the basis for a comprehensive website. This initiative may be seen as one catalyst for the rise in American Studies applications at the end of the decade.

Spring 2010 saw the beginning of the American Schools Project, run by Wendy McMahon at the University of East Anglia, which promotes the relevance of American Studies to school children in Norwich and seeks to strengthen relations between the university and the local community. A book and a digital exhibition (both 2010) have already emerged from this project.

¹⁴ Hannah Lowe, ‘Issues Affecting CIC Sixth Form Student Recruitment to American Studies’, in *American Studies in Britain*, Issue 96 (Spring 2007).

Despite these initiatives and others like them, Heidi Macpherson claims that the American Studies community is “not as good as we should be at awareness-raising amongst teachers.” However, she admits, “this is labour intensive” and tends to operate at “a very local level” to the catchment areas of particular universities.

3. Disciplinary Developments

3.1. Definitions

The definition of American Studies has been a source of intense debate over the last decade. Indeed, the very idea of a single, coherent definition of the discipline is not something that appeals to many members of the community. Martin Halliwell argues, “there are many different conceptions of the discipline. There’s no single model.” Christopher Bigsby states, “American Studies is a culture, not a discipline,” while Paul Giles, noting similar debates taking place in Australia and the UK, concludes: “American Studies in the twenty-first century is less a distinctive subject than a critical methodology.” Philip Davies, meanwhile, is concerned about a “dispersal of energies” resulting from more fragmented disciplinary models, a trend which he thinks is more likely to produce ineffective perspectives.

One specific redefinition of the discipline that has gathered momentum in recent years is outlined by Susan Castillo: “American Studies is no longer coterminous with US Studies.” The shift to a more transnational perspective is examined in more detail below, but Castillo warns, “British universities are still wedded to Enlightenment taxonomies of disciplinarity.” From an American perspective, British scholars are “still seen to be somewhat in thrall to antiquarian notions of disciplinarity” and are “thought to be a little old-fashioned.” Celeste-Marie Bernier also sees a “gap in scholarly groups” between those working in an interdisciplinary fashion and those working in traditional disciplinary paradigms such as foreign policy, literary studies and cultural studies. She says, “the model of American Studies in the UK has a conservative side and an adventurous side.”

3.2. Composition of Degree Programmes

Along with a redefinition of American Studies, many changes, as well as variations in emphasis, can be observed in the composition of American Studies degree programmes. Some institutions (such as the University of Birmingham and the University of Nottingham) stress links between the United States and Canada, while others (such as the Institute for the Study of the Americas) promote links with non-Anglophone areas.

Martin Halliwell notes the rise in interdisciplinary courses examining the West, the South and the American city, ensuring students are much more aware of place, region and community. However, he believes there has also been a reduction in coverage of earlier eras: “It’s very difficult to get students interested in the colonial period. Most American Studies students are interested in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.” In addition, Halliwell points out that there still tends to be “two sides” to American Studies degrees: history and politics are positioned on one side, with literary and visual culture on the other. “This divide could do with being broken down more,” he says.

There remain concerns, though, that American Studies degree programmes have failed to keep pace with some of the broader intellectual developments in the discipline, especially

in terms of geography, ethnicity and gender. Michael Collins says that as an undergraduate, “at times, I felt like American Studies was about New England. There is much to be done with expanding the Latin American aspects.” Celeste-Marie Bernier agrees that nineteenth-century literary courses continue to be “basically New England literature.” At the same time, there is also substantial concern about the lack of politics now evident in American Studies degree programmes. Philip Davies sees a decline in the “traditional” American Studies degree which used to be composed equally of political, historical and cultural elements. Now, he comments, cultural materials have, in many instances, grown to occupy two-thirds of the syllabus, and history and politics combined comprise only a third. He believes it is a “recruitment mistake” for degree programmes to prioritise American culture since it is American history and politics that is taught at A-Level. There is a broader acceptance that American Studies needs to rediscover the importance of the Social Sciences, although Geoffrey Plank states that, “economics, sociology and other Social Sciences are not often considered to be part of American Studies. We situate ourselves in the Humanities.”

Many observers have noted changing attitudes and interests among undergraduate students of American Studies. Michael Collins voices a common belief when he states, “students want to be offered courses about *now*. They’re not interested in context, they want to know what America is doing now.” Teaching at Swansea University towards the end of the decade, Subarno Chattarji was “particularly struck by the depth and sophistication” of the students’ responses to recent political events: “They were indicative of engagements with the US that moved beyond the viscerally anti-American and perceived the need for more complex interventions across a range of issues.”

A year (or semester) in the United States (or in Canada, Latin America or the Caribbean, in some cases) remains a distinctive element of most American Studies degree programmes, part of a much wider transatlantic exchange that sees more than 8,000 UK students study in the US each year. Judie Newman claims that, “after the year abroad, students come back with a much more considered attitude to study.” The University of Sussex maintains one of the largest exchange programmes in the UK with 120 exchange places available at over 40 public and private universities in the United States and Canada. However, with the introduction and subsequent extension of tuition fees, the cost of an additional year abroad has been noted by many observers as one factor for the decline in American Studies applications.¹⁵ Other transatlantic links have developed in recent years. Since 2009, the University of Nottingham has offered a series of student placements in the United States that currently includes internships at Fox Studios and Lionsgate Studios in Los Angeles. These placements are open to all students in the Department of American and Canadian Studies, as well as students in the Department of Culture, Film and Media. The placements at Fox emerged from conversations with Peter Rice, an American Studies graduate from Nottingham, who is now chairman of Fox Broadcasting.

¹⁵ See, for example, the letter published by Simon Newman, then BAAS Chair, in *The Guardian* on 28 August 2004. This was part of a robust response on behalf of the American Studies community to Polly Toynbee’s aforementioned article on the discipline’s decline.

3.3. Transnationalism

There is little doubt that the most contentious and formative theoretical development of the decade for American Studies has been the emergence of transnationalism.¹⁶ Martin Halliwell describes it as “a transformative paradigm” – one which has produced a wealth of new scholarly perspectives and groupings (such as the Society for the History of Women in the Americas, outlined below). One argument is that transnationalism superseded the more specific focus on transatlanticism at the turn of the millennium, as scholarship started to provide closer attention to critiques of the nation state and global relations, and the study of Hispanic and Asian histories and cultures, both within and beyond the United States, received greater emphasis. Because of demographic changes in the United States, Susan Castillo believes transnationalism “will only increase.” “Our object of study is changing,” she concludes. Clear evidence for this can be seen in degree programmes at the University of Portsmouth and the University of Warwick that now emphasise a Pan-American approach, with attendant study abroad opportunities in Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean.

While Portsmouth, Warwick and other institutions do offer (and sometimes insist upon) students learning French, Portuguese or Spanish as part of an American Studies degree, language remains for the most part an unresolved question in this debate. Back in 1999, Paul Giles stated that there will be “a compelling need for the next generation of Americanists, particularly literature specialists, to be more conversant with Hispanic and other non-Anglophone languages than my generation has been.”¹⁷ There is little evidence that such a comprehensive change has taken place since then. For the conventional model of undergraduate American Studies, a required knowledge of Spanish or other languages is deeply problematic, as Dick Ellis explains: “If you make languages compulsory, you’ll kill recruitment.”

Other ambivalent or dissenting voices can be heard whenever transnationalism is raised. Judie Newman claims, “transnationalism is the soft option for those who don’t want to engage with globalisation. You have to look at economics.” Moreover, Malcolm McLaughlin believes, “transnationalism is spoken about more often than it is done. I don’t meet many people who ‘do’ transnationalism. Our profession is good at creating fashions and transnationalism might be overstated.”

The debate over transnationalism also has implications for the position of American Studies within the broader Area Studies grouping. Heidi Macpherson says, “you can’t talk about American Studies as if it is unique. It intersects with Area Studies.” At the same time, there is consensus that American Studies remains the most popular and the most vocal discipline within Area Studies. However, Michael Heale states, “I’m not sure that the younger generation is much interested in the culture/history/politics of a single country. Area Studies to them may seem anachronistic, and this may have hurt American Studies applications as well as George W. Bush.”

¹⁶ For many of the key arguments in this debate, see the special issue on “Transnational American Studies” of *Comparative American Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (March 2008), edited by Paul Giles and R. J. Ellis.

¹⁷ ‘Forum: American Studies At The Millennium – Some Thoughts’, in *American Studies in Britain*, Issue 81 (Autumn/Winter 1999).

3.4. Strengths and Weaknesses in British Scholarship

There is broad agreement that the early part of the twenty-first century saw British historians of the United States particularly excel. Since its inception in 2004, the annual BAAS Book Prize has been dominated by historical studies, with a notable trend toward cultural history. Nigel Bowles claims it is historians who are doing “the most interesting work” in American Studies, while Judie Newman notes that “American history is flourishing inside History departments.” In particular, Iwan Morgan thinks British scholars “have made their strongest contribution” in the study of Civil Rights. Susan Castillo pinpoints specific strengths in revolutionary history and in studies of slavery, while Michael Collins, Paul Giles and Richard King perceive a growing interest in intellectual history – an interest epitomised by the Intellectual History Group jointly established in 2002 by the universities of Cambridge and Nottingham. In addition, many observers have emphasised British expertise in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature.

In terms of where current British scholarship may be lacking, Susan Castillo thinks “pre-1800 material tends to be neglected,” an assessment Catherine Morley supports. Other topics that have been identified as receiving insufficient critical study are American television, Women’s Studies, American religion, and the history of science. There is also a sense amongst some observers that, as Richard King puts it, scholarly ambitions in the community are “too modest.” Michael Collins agrees that “things have become very specific” in American Studies.

Perhaps the greatest level of concern has been expressed for the study of American politics in the UK. Nigel Bowles claims the subject is “in crisis” and that research into American politics “doesn’t get you a job.” In particular, Bowles claims that Congress is now “woefully ignored” and that the study of local government is “a serious weakness” – conceivably because of “the seductive call of Presidential politics.” Iwan Morgan confirms a lack of interest amongst postgraduate students for modules examining the US Congress, but also points out the failure of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to support British projects on American politics. It must be added, though, that the work of several contemporary British scholars specializing in American politics has been highlighted by respondents for its excellence.

More broadly, there is also some anxiety about the reception of British work in the United States. Iwan Morgan claims there is a “glass ceiling” for British Americanists in the United States, while Dick Ellis believes there has been a decline in the number of British Americanists being recognised in the US to the extent that scholars like Malcolm Bradbury and Howard Temperley were in the past. As a consequence, Ellis observes, it has become difficult for UK scholars to get jobs in the US because of “a decline in prominence.”

4. Research Assessment Exercises

4.1. 2001 Research Assessment Exercise

The 2001 RAE featured submissions from 13 institutions to the American Studies panel, with a total of 114 research active staff assessed. On a quality scale of 1-5*, all 13 institutions achieved ratings between 3 and 5*. Five departments – at Keele University,

the University of Liverpool, the Institute for Latin American Studies, the University of Nottingham, and the University of Sussex – achieved 5 or 5* ratings.

An attendant report written by the American Studies panel chair, Judie Newman, stressed at the outset that the “panel did not see a substantial proportion of the work actually being carried out in the area” (as much Americanist scholarship was submitted to the English, History and Politics subpanels of the RAE) and that the subsequent findings were therefore “misleading” in their picture of the discipline. Overall, though, the report concluded that “the standard of research activity had risen” and that there had been particular growth in Film, Media and Cultural Studies. Submitted work was also said to be “moving productively across national boundaries.”¹⁸

4.2. 2008 Research Assessment Exercise

The 2008 RAE saw only eight institutions submit material to the American Studies and Anglophone Area Studies panel, featuring a total of 92 research active staff. Over 80% of the submissions were judged to be of international quality. Four departments – at the University of Birmingham, the University of East Anglia, the University of Nottingham, and the University of Sussex – had 20% or more of their research achieve the highest 4* grading, meaning it was deemed to be of a quality “world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour.”

Once again, the report published by the panel admitted that the data covered “only a fraction” of the research taking place in the discipline (the English, History and Politics subpanels again assessed many American Studies publications as part of broader departmental submissions). Nonetheless, it concluded that there had been an increase in quality since 2001 and that there had been a “significant increase” in postgraduate numbers.¹⁹ Helen Taylor, a member of the 2008 panel, claims, “I saw wonderful work” and “lots of interesting archival work” in particular. She also admits: “It’s difficult to judge research, especially interdisciplinary work – there’s something deadly about it.”

The publication of the 2008 RAE produced considerable debate within the American Studies community. Dick Ellis and Peter Messent noted that research funding in American Studies had dropped by 22% following the publication of the results. They also pointed out that institutions that had submitted in English, History and American Studies suffered poorer returns in the latter discipline. They concluded that the American Studies panel “judged less generously than its peers, and that not enough adjustment was made at a higher level to compensate for that fact.”²⁰

Ellis now claims, “the statistics show that across the whole of the 2008 RAE (covering all subjects) small departments didn’t do well; that small subjects like American Studies often had a troubled time; and that Area Studies didn’t do well generally.” Taking into account subsequent reductions in staff at several departments across the country, American Studies departments do seem to become vulnerable after RAE results are published. Ellis believes that the decision of so many Americanists to submit their work into other panels created “a divide in the community.”

¹⁸ Source: <http://www.rae.ac.uk/2001>.

¹⁹ Source: <http://www.rae.ac.uk>.

²⁰ Peter Messent and R. J. Ellis, ‘Following RAE 2008’, in *American Studies in Britain*, Issue 101 (Autumn 2009).

Richard King highlights other consequences of the research assessment process: “Because of the RAE/REF, younger and older scholars have been pressured to turn out shorter studies (introductions, surveys, narrowly focused monographs) rather than encouraged to spend a longer time working on wide ranging and more definitive studies.” Heidi Macpherson concludes that with the 2008 RAE the “American Studies community shot itself in the foot. Whenever a very low number of people enter, statistical averages are harder to deal with.”

5. American Studies Research Centres

5.1. Rothermere American Institute (RAI), University of Oxford

Established in 2001, the RAI has become a major resource for the American Studies community in the UK – the location of the outstanding Vere Harmsworth Library, the host of five chairs and visiting chairs, and the venue for over 100 events a year. The current Director Nigel Bowles explains that “it wasn’t good enough that Oxford didn’t have a separate institution” for the study of the United States. Bowles stresses, though, that the RAI “is not just an Oxford entity” but also “a home for colleagues in American Studies throughout the country.” While it was conceived in the 1990s as a centre to be exclusively devoted to American history and politics, by its opening the RAI’s remit had extended to literature and culture, too. The centre has attracted a number of high-profile speakers: its ‘Transatlantic Dialogues in Public Policy’ series involved sessions with the likes of Sidney Blumenthal, Gary Hart and Robert Reich, while other visiting speakers have included Richard Ford, Lorrie Moore, Joyce Carol Oates and Tom Wolfe. Paul Giles, Director of the RAI from 2003 to 2008, noted that “the RAI is fortunate in not having to bother about the RAE, and it is surely healthy for American Studies in Britain to have at least one academic centre where state-sponsored rules of bureaucratic assessment, honed by the usual threats from university administrations, do not apply.”²¹

Tensions have also arisen from the establishment of the RAI. Giles himself explains that “the suspicion towards the interdisciplinary nature of American Studies (and the RAI itself) endemic to more traditional aspects of Oxford college life was matched by an implicit hostility within some quarters of the BAAS community, which tended to regard the RAI [...] as an interloper, a latecomer to the field of American Studies in the UK.” There remains a sense among some observers that the centre has not been utilised as much as it should have been. For instance, Richard King stresses that the RAI is “an invaluable resource and deserves more attention and use.”

5.2. Institute for the Study of the Americas (ISA), University of London

In 2004, the Institute of United States Studies (IUSS) and the Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS), both of which had been founded in 1965, merged to form the Institute for the Study of the Americas (ISA). Part of the University of London’s School of Advanced Study until 2012, the ISA houses scholars exploring North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. When the merger took place, Heidi Macpherson remembers “there was a real feeling of grief, as if we were losing something.” There has been

²¹ Paul Giles, ‘Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford: News, Events and Plans’, in *American Studies in Britain*, Issue 93 (Autumn 2005).

continued concern over the US concentration at the ISA, though Judie Newman believes the ISA “works better now.”

Towards the end of the decade, the ISA has, according to Iwan Morgan, suffered from “diminishing resources.” It has seen a reduction in staff working on North American topics and has experienced a fall in the number of MA students. Budgetary constraints have inevitably led to a narrower focus, with no North American literature or culture being taught at the ISA (with the exception of a module concerning the Presidency on film). Nonetheless, Morgan emphasises that the ISA maintains “a very good informal relationship” with the US Embassy, which has become a “generous supporter of the ISA’s events programme.” In 2008, the ISA launched its United States Presidential Centre. One of the most significant pieces of research to emerge from this was a 2009 survey in which 47 UK specialists on US history and politics rated the performance of all US presidents. The subsequent report was a lead story on the BBC’s website and led to a trebling of website traffic for the ISA.

The development of both the RAI and the ISA has raised some additional questions. Judie Newman explains: “There’s always been a problem with American Studies in that it is not top of the agenda in Oxford, Cambridge and London. The flagship isn’t there and that’s a problem, a fundamental structural weakness for American Studies.” Heidi Macpherson agrees that neither the ISA or the RAI act as “a focal point” for American Studies, while Celeste-Marie Bernier argues that American Studies continues to suffer because of scepticism at Oxbridge, in particular: “‘studies’ disciplines make traditional institutions queasy – they are seen as a soft, diluted hybrid rather than a rigorous paradigm.” Such uncertainties have clearly had a detrimental effect on the status and visibility of American Studies in the UK, though they do not represent a major shift from the 1990s when the University of East Anglia, Keele University, the University of Nottingham, and the University of Sussex were widely seen as the flagship American Studies departments in the UK and, between them, had the greatest concentration of postgraduate students.

5.3. Development of Other Research Centres

Established in 1987, the American Studies Resource Centre at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) has, among other activities, maintained a highly popular website throughout the last decade. Between 2000 and 2006, visits to the website rose from 15,417 to 69,839 and have remained high, despite the downsizing of American Studies at LJMU in the second half of the decade.²²

In recent years, the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library (established in 1991) has become, in the words of its current Director, Philip Davies, “a more noisy” and “more noticed” place. As well as hosting researchers from around the UK and the rest of the world, the centre distributes an extensive range of awards. Its annual American politics conference aimed at school teachers and pupils now attracts over 500 attendees.

Founded in 1997, the Andrew Hook Centre for American Studies at the University of Glasgow houses a community of academics from across the university, with teaching for postgraduate students. The centre also runs the West of Scotland American Studies

²² Ian Ralston, ‘The American Studies Centre at Liverpool John Moores University: 20 Years of Resourcing American Studies’, in *American Studies in Britain*, Issue 97 (Autumn 2007).

lecture and seminar series. Other important teaching and research centres in the UK include the Arthur Miller Centre for American Studies at the University of East Anglia, the David Bruce Centre for American Studies at Keele University, and the Marcus Cunliffe Centre for the Study of the American South at the University of Sussex.

6. Fulbright Commission

Among many activities, the Fulbright Commission runs a prestigious awards programme that enables UK citizens to study, lecture or research in the USA. During the 1980s and 1990s, over 40 UK scholars with a distinct focus on American topics (in history, literature and politics) received Fulbright awards to research in the United States, almost half of whom were recipients of a specific American Studies Fellowship last issued in 1994. However, the last decade has seen an almost total absence of American Studies scholars receiving Fulbright awards. This may partly be attributed to the Fulbright Commission receiving an 11% cut in funding in 1996, leading to the loss of many long-running programmes. According to Michael Scott-Kline, the current Director of the Fulbright Awards Programme, “American Studies simply fell out of favour.” Interestingly, the wider pattern of applications and grantees for the Fulbright Awards Programme echoes to an extent certain trends already noted in American Studies, with a slump between 2005 and 2008 being followed by a noticeable increase at the end of the decade. Indeed, the number of UK scholars travelling to the US on a Fulbright award more than doubled between 2005/2006 and 2010/2011, largely thanks to new partnerships and a raised profile for the awards.

Sam Edwards, now a Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, was an exception to the broader trend when he received a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar Award to travel to Pittsburgh for an American history project in 2009/2010. Edwards makes the point that these awards are based on individual cultural exchange regardless of research subject. Moreover, he states that “a key aim of the Fulbright programme is to offer an American experience to those previously unfamiliar with the US.” Therefore, “for us Americanists, the first problem in applying to the US-UK Fulbright Programme is just that: we’re already Americanists. For the Fulbright Commission, it might be that giving us an award would be like preaching to the converted.” Indeed, it is the case that many people who have undertaken short research trips to the United States or studied there at undergraduate level wrongly assume they are not eligible for a Fulbright award. At present, the Fulbright Commission are developing two new early career and postgraduate opportunities specific to American Studies scholars. In addition, the Fulbright Specialist Programme, which brings US academic faculty to the UK for short collaborative visits, has benefited American Studies departments in Kent and Swansea in recent years.

One other important Fulbright project in recent years has been an American Studies Summer School held at New York University, an initiative supported by the US Embassy. Held in 2009, 2010 and 2011, this programme was specifically designed to encourage the next generation of American Studies professionals in the UK. Across the three years, 26 postgraduate students and early career scholars from 19 different institutions in England, Scotland and Wales took part in a variety of cultural and academic sessions in New York, with additional trips to Boston and Washington DC. Michael Collins, who attended in 2010, describes it as “a hugely enriching experience that provided excellent preparation for a career teaching American Studies. As well as

generating valuable transatlantic contacts for future research, it also helped cement important working partnerships between young British scholars in the field.”

7. American Studies Organisations

7.1. British Association for American Studies (BAAS)

Founded in 1955, BAAS remains the largest American Studies organisation in the UK and the third largest American Studies association in Europe. Shelley Fisher Fishkin describes it as “a beacon of stellar scholarship and generous collegiality.” There is consensus that BAAS has developed significantly in recent years. Iwan Morgan claims that between 1985 and 2005, BAAS “changed out of all recognition.” It is now, he says, “a more open, vibrant, proactive organisation.” Helen Taylor believes that “BAAS has been led by very strong leaders in the last few years. The Executive has become much stronger and a lot of energy has come into it.” She concludes, “it is so much more interesting than the BAAS I joined.” Catherine Morley points out that “a much wider range of institutions” are now involved in BAAS, and that there has been “a huge increase in media interest in the organization and an ongoing rise in BAAS’s public profile.” Furthermore, she outlines how the association’s priorities have changed, with increased participation in consultation exercises. For instance, in 1999 BAAS led a successful campaign to reverse a UCAS proposal to abolish the American Studies subject code. The current BAAS Chair Martin Halliwell explains that “you often feel with American Studies that you’re saying, ‘don’t forget about us’. Sometimes we disappear under the radar when it comes to research council funding or institutional recognition.”

Other voices, however, express some concern over the recent development of the organisation. Michael Collins thinks “BAAS has suffered with the transnational turn” because “British American Studies needs a coherent model.” Judie Newman also feels “the sharp political edge has gone from BAAS,” partly because of the decline in free-standing American Studies degrees.

Paul Giles, who served on the BAAS Executive between 1998 and 2001, outlines his thoughts on the organisation at that time: “Its main concern was preserving a sufficient volume of programmes in the UK to justify the preservation of a separate funding stream. [...] It had an inherent tendency to become self-perpetuating, and to regard with suspicion any move to place the subject within a broader context, fearing that such a move might have the effect of undermining the subject’s national profile.” This is a tendency Giles believes has been prevalent in Germany and other parts of continental Europe. He thinks BAAS has neglected scholars who place American Studies in a transatlantic context. Giles also raises questions about the ethnic diversity of BAAS: “the absence of any substantial involvement within BAAS on the part of black British scholars, despite several of them having been very influential within the wider field – Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall – is both odd and troubling.”²³ Heidi Macpherson agrees that BAAS needs become more ethnically diverse, and she also stresses a need for increased engagement with Queer Studies.

The membership of BAAS has fluctuated throughout the decade, not least because of changes in how subscription fees have been collected and membership numbers

²³ Paul Gilroy will be a plenary speaker at the 2013 BAAS conference at the University of Exeter.

calculated. In 1998, the organisation had 440 members, which had grown to 600 (including 194 postgraduates) by 2005. By the end of the decade, the membership stood at 481 (with 171 postgraduates). Over the course of the last decade, several regional groupings of BAAS members – such as those in the North-West, the Midlands and the South-West – have first developed and then declined, conceivably because of advances in electronic communication.

The annual BAAS conference has grown throughout the decade. For example, while the programme for the 2002 conference at the University of Oxford listed 137 papers, the programme for the 2009 conference in Nottingham listed 243 papers, plus keynote lectures, workshops, roundtable discussions and trips. A broad geographical spread has also been encouraged with conferences in England, Scotland and Wales throughout this ten-year period.

The development of the BAAS conference has been noted by many observers. In particular, several people have commented on how much more inclusive and friendly the event has become, especially for women and postgraduate students. Martin Halliwell feels that a growing postgraduate presence “has enriched the conference” and provided more “multi-generational conversations.” Shelley Fisher Fiskin says, “it was not until I keynoted a BAAS conference in 2005 [BAAS’ 50th anniversary conference at the University of Cambridge] that I really became aware of how vibrant the field of American Studies was in the UK. That conference was an exhilarating smorgasbord of fascinating research.”

However, while Judie Newman also emphasises how “friendly and discursive” the BAAS conference has become, she feels the event has been “weakened” by the increasing numbers of papers accepted for presentation. In the past, she states, the BAAS conference “could be brutal, but it carried a lot of intellectual credibility.” Now, she worries that “the BAAS conference is seen as not counting.” Richard King argues that “fewer sessions and more devoted to only one or two presentations might help give a greater solidity and depth to sessions at the conference.”

The BAAS conference has also become a major occasion for the distribution of awards in the American Studies community. In 1998, BAAS distributed under £2000 in awards, prizes and travel grants. By 2005, this had reached over £30,000 and by the end of the decade, £40,000. Recently, BAAS has issued an annual Honorary Fellowship. Mick Gidley and Richard King were the first two recipients in 2009 and Michael Heale was honoured in 2010, followed by Helen Taylor in 2011 and Susan Castillo in 2012. In light of earlier discussions, it is interesting that Taylor notes, “I have never worked in an American Studies department.”

The BAAS postgraduate conference is now also a regular fixture in the academic calendar, usually featuring around 25 papers and attracting between 50 and 80 delegates (with over 100 attending at the University of Manchester in 2007). The geographical spread of this event has been much less pronounced than the main BAAS conference, with no conferences in Scotland or Wales during the last decade and a concentration on the Midlands and the North of England. Catherine Morley emphasises the “nurturing role” BAAS provides for young scholars. Indeed, Morley (who was BAAS Secretary between 2007 and 2011) is one of three former BAAS Postgraduate Representatives, along with Celeste-Marie Bernier and Michael Collins, who have gone on to serve on the organisation’s main Executive during the last decade. That said, there has been concern

from many observers, including Susan Castillo, John Horne and Judie Newman, about the recruitment and fostering of postgraduates within American Studies, especially in the context of rising student debt and increasing requirements to publish.

In recent times, BAAS has strengthened its long-standing relationship with the Embassy of the United States in London. Philip Davies admits relations between BAAS and the US Embassy were “cool” when he became Chair in 1998, but since then the relationship has become much warmer. Sue Wedlake, a Senior Cultural Specialist at the Embassy, has missed only one BAAS conference since 1997. As well as its support for individual university conferences, publications and visiting speakers, the US Embassy in London also sponsors (through BAAS) the Ambassador’s Awards (instituted in 2004) and subsidizes postgraduate places at the BAAS conference. Wedlake says, “BAAS provides a road map and a strong regional network for the Embassy, not only to measure the state of American Studies but Higher Education in the UK generally.” Martin Halliwell confirms that the Embassy continues to play an important role in raising the profile of BAAS and offers sponsorship for a range of American Studies initiatives.

7.2. Other American Studies Organisations and Research Groupings

The American Politics Group (APG), established in 1974, remains a strong presence in the American Studies community, with around 100 members, a mailing list which reaches 250 people, and an annual conference which typically attracts between 30 and 60 delegates. It is a member of the broader Political Studies Association. Nigel Bowles notes that the APG does “very excellent work” though “it is not theoretically driven.”

Established in 1993, the Association of British American Nineteenth Century Historians (BrANCH) focuses on US History between 1789 and 1917. It promotes its aims through the journal *American Nineteenth Century History*, an annual conference, and a series of grants and prizes. It currently has a membership of around 60.

The Scottish Association for the Study of America (SASA) was established in 1999. In the first SASA newsletter, Susan-Mary Grant outlined some of the driving factors behind the creation of the organization, such as geographical distance from events in the rest of the UK and the attendant financial implications. In addition, she claimed the establishment of SASA “was prompted by the formation of the Scottish Parliament. In the same way as BAAS makes a case in Westminster, there is now clearly a need for a Scottish association which can keep the new parliament apprised of the issues involved in teaching American subjects.” SASA’s first Chair, Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, offered further explanation for this new organisation: “Americanists in Scotland increasingly operate on a direct Scotland-USA axis, not on a Scotland-London axis or a Scotland-Oxbridge axis. American activities in the South of England therefore seem remote, and do not attract conspicuous support from North of the Border.”²⁴ Ben Marsh, the current Chair of SASA, notes that the “vibrant” American Studies community in Scotland has particular expertise in early American and twentieth-century American history. Membership of SASA has ranged from around 100 early in the decade to about 60 today.

The British Group in Early American History (BGEAH) – an informal and extra-institutional collective of scholars interested in the early modern Atlantic world – has run an annual conference since 2000. Simon Newman describes it as “home to a remarkable

²⁴ SASA Newsletter, Issue 1 (1999).

set of historians” and “the venue at which many of us – myself included – first present our new research.” BGEAH helped to spawn the European Early American Studies Association, a group whose informal beginnings were consolidated towards the end of the decade. Between 2008 (when its biennial conferences began) and 2010, the association was funded by an Arts and Humanities Research Council Network Grant. Newman makes the point that “those of us working on early American research topics now think of ourselves as Europeans as much as Britons, often sharing research and co-organizing and developing conferences and research projects.”

The Transatlantic Studies Association (TSA) was inaugurated in 2002. By 2007, its mailing list reached 700 academics and its annual conference regularly attracts well over 100 delegates. Political, economic and diplomatic relations have been a strong focus of the association, with a lesser focus on literary and cultural issues. The TSA supports the *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*.

Historians of Twentieth Century America (HOTCUS) was established in 2007. It currently has a membership of around 100 with ambitions to double in size over the next few years. Its 2010 conference featured over fifty papers delivered by speakers from the UK, the United States, Canada, France, Germany and Spain. Iwan Morgan claims HOTCUS is intended to be “complimentary rather than competitive” and members are keen to ensure it works effectively with BAAS.

The Society for the History of Women in the Americas (SHAW) was established in 2008 under the original title British Historians of Women in the Americas. It has two key purposes. Firstly, to provide an arena in which scholars interested in women’s and gender history in the Americas can come together. Secondly, to encourage interdisciplinary and transnational approaches in research on women and gender in North America, South America and the Caribbean. The organisation currently has 49 members based in the UK, across the Americas and in several European countries. Members are largely historians, though a number emanate from a literature background.

UK-based scholars continue to play key roles in the development of broader organisations, such as the European Association of American Studies (founded in 1954) and the International American Studies Association (founded in 2000), both of which host biannual conferences. Martin Halliwell is adamant that “we need more international collaboration in American Studies.”

Therefore, alongside concerns about departmental closures, undergraduate admissions and research assessment criteria, the growth of these various American Studies organisations suggests a discipline in distinct health. Within BAAS and the wider community, however, there remains a long-running debate about the implications arising from these groupings. Dick Ellis notes, “American Studies is becoming more and more dispersed with a growth in fragmentary groups.” Martin Halliwell says, “it is good that there are more specific groups, but from a BAAS perspective there is a danger that it undermines the idea of American Studies as an over-arching model.” Celeste-Marie Bernier, on the other hand, is much more positive about their development, and believes that “the hesitancy concerning other groups is ludicrous.” Susan Castillo emphasises that “Americanists do have to band together to lobby strategically,” but ultimately “our loyalty must be to knowledge and to how that can be produced most effectively.” Noting the success of organisations such as BrANCH and HOTCUS, Michael Heale says that the “tendency for historians to have their own meetings has also been noted in other

European countries, such as Germany. In short, the danger, if it is a danger, of American Studies being seen as a holistic subject is that scholars in traditional disciplines may break away, which seems to have happened in some degree in recent years.”

One final remark on these emerging organisations. As John Horne points out, at the present moment, American Studies societies and organisations still operate through fairly traditional means: newsletters, mailing lists, meetings and annual conferences. However, Horne believes they should “seriously consider putting resources into growing their online provisions.” This, he states, “could build a truly new academic public sphere, unbounded by national or institutional boundaries which could shape – and transform – how America is discussed and understood over the coming decades.” The coverage and debates issuing from the EA Worldview website, set up in 2009, might offer one model for how online media can transform American Studies.²⁵

8. Publications

8.1. *Journal of American Studies (JAS)*

There is widespread agreement that *JAS* stands as a leading international journal. The European Reference Index for the Humanities has given the journal an ‘A’ rating in its Literature category, while the Australian Research Council recently awarded the journal an ‘A’ rating in its Historical Studies category. The online archive of *JAS* is now provided to all Higher Education institutions in Germany. Shelley Fisher Fishkin describes the journal as “prestigious” and Michael Collins describes it as “one of the strongest, most cohesive factors” in British American Studies scholarship.

In its 34 issues between 2000 and 2010, *JAS* published 234 articles and 22 review essays. Notably, 67% of these articles and 91% of the review essays were written by men. However, there was a slight shift in the second half of the decade towards gender equality. It should also be noted that the gender imbalance seen in the published articles closely follows the gender imbalance in submissions. For example, of the 198 articles submitted to *JAS* between 2007 and 2009, only 31% were from women.

Recent submissions to *JAS* have been dominated to an almost equal degree by scholars based in the UK and the United States, though nearly one in five submissions now come from the rest of the world. Although submission numbers have dropped after a large increase in the mid-1990s, it remains a highly competitive journal, with fewer than 20% of submissions accepted without any revision, and over half of submissions rejected after peer review.

Categorizing articles by discipline is a tricky endeavor for an interdisciplinary journal. Nonetheless, Susan Castillo, Associate Editor and Editor of *JAS* from 2003 to 2011, noted in 2007 a decline in submissions in twentieth-century American history and increased submissions in the areas of Asian-American literature, religion, and particularly Queer Studies – promising signs given that these are considered by some observers to be neglected topics in current British American Studies scholarship. After peaks in the mid to late 1990s, submissions on popular culture and Film Studies declined in the 2000s.

²⁵ See <http://www.enduringamerica.com>.

Since 2009, the full archive of *JAS* (from 1967 onwards) has been available online and its predecessor, the *Bulletin of the British Association for American Studies* (1956-1967), is now also available. In 2010, 21 of the top 30 institutions downloading full articles from the *JAS* archive were North American universities. To emphasise the growing digital reach of the journal, between 2009 and 2010 the average monthly usage of *JAS* increased by 82%.

8.2. Other American Studies Publications

Leading UK-based American Studies publications which have emerged over the last decade include the *European Journal of American Culture* (founded in 2000); *Comparative American Studies* (founded in 2003), which emphasises both global networks and multi-ethnic comparisons within the USA; and the *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* (founded in 2004), which has a focus on post-1945 affairs.

Founded as one of the world's first e-journals in 1999, *49th Parallel: An Interdisciplinary Journal of North American Studies* is an open-access publication run entirely by postgraduate students. Three former editors of the journal, Hannah Durkin, John Horne and Ben Offiler, claim that "online publication will soon come to dominate academia and that any prejudices towards it will fade." The US Embassy, for example, has recently withdrawn funding from print journals in favour of online projects. In addition, the speed and potential reach of online publishing offers particular possibilities for postgraduate students who wish to disseminate material quickly and widely in the hope of establishing a reputation in the field.

By way of comparison with *JAS*, it is interesting to note how the articles published in *US Studies Online* – the BAAS postgraduate journal established in 2001 – relate in terms of gender. Here, the distribution of articles over the last decade has been much more equal, with 51% written by men and 49% by women. However, it should also be borne in mind that HESA figures show that throughout the last decade around 60% of undergraduate and postgraduate students on American Studies courses were women. Between 2001 and 2010, *US Studies Online* published papers from 30 institutions across seven countries, suggesting an impressive reach for a postgraduate publication.

Finally, it is important to note the role UK-based scholars continue to play in international journals. For example, Shelley Fisher Fishkin explains, "when I co-founded the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* in 2009, it was a pleasure to invite several British scholars to serve on the advisory board."

9. Future Prospects for American Studies

The potential impact on American Studies programmes of increased tuition fees, beginning in 2012/2013, is a serious cause for concern for many observers. Susan Castillo warns, "parents with deep pockets don't tend to be liberal in their intellectual outlook." Judie Newman adds, "tuition fees could mean people go more vocational, but American Studies demonstrates they can survive in America and handle lots of disciplines." There is an ongoing debate about how (and how much) American Studies staff should confront student anxieties concerning job prospects. Michael Collins believes, "American Studies is very good at training people to be postgraduates, but it is a little disconnected with the world outside."

In terms of how the discipline might present itself in the future, Ali Fisher (whose PhD, completed at the University of Birmingham in the mid-2000s, examined the early history of American Studies in Europe) believes that the problem with American Studies as it stands is that its research, where textual and thematic analysis take precedence over statistical data and images, “is not suited to the contemporary media environment.” “American Studies has such an opportunity to be cross-cutting, now more than ever,” he argues. It has “a massive opportunity” because the media is multidisciplinary, but American Studies itself must understand how media are interrelated. Similarly, John Horne talks of the “incredible potential vested in this confluence of online information and new modes of communication, which could be harnessed in the service of American Studies.” Celeste-Marie Bernier agrees that “we should be accountable and we should be able to translate our work for different audiences.”

The changing nature of American economic and political power will also be a key factor in shaping American Studies in the UK in the coming years. For Iwan Morgan, “America remains the key player in global politics and will remain so for some time. Even then, its decline will need to be studied. For us to reduce our capacity to understand America just as we’re at our historic peak is lunacy.”

Susan Castillo, though, is less anxious about prospects for the discipline: “Americanists are good strategists and we’ve gone through recessions before, so I’m cautiously optimistic about the future.” Heidi Macpherson agrees: “we should be optimistic about the future. People are interested in American topics.”

10. Project Sources

10.1. Interviews Conducted

- Professor Celeste-Marie Bernier (University of Nottingham).
- Dr Nigel Bowles (Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford).
- Professor Susan Castillo (King's College London).
- Dr Michael J. Collins (University of Nottingham).
- Professor Philip Davies (Eccles Centre for American Studies, British Library; BAAS Chair, 1998-2004).
- Professor Dick Ellis (University of Birmingham).
- Dr Ali Fisher (Mappa Mundi Consulting).
- Professor Martin Halliwell (University of Leicester; BAAS Chair, 2010-).
- Professor Heidi Macpherson (De Montfort University; BAAS Chair, 2007-2010).
- Professor Iwan Morgan (Institute for the Study of the Americas).
- Professor Judie Newman (University of Nottingham; BAAS Chair, 1995-1998).
- Dr Ian Scott (University of Manchester).
- Professor Helen Taylor (University of Exeter).
- Professor Brian Ward (University of Manchester).

10.2. Written Contributions

- Dr Subarno Chattarji (University of Delhi).
- Hannah Durkin, John Horne and Ben Offiler (*49th Parallel: An Interdisciplinary Journal of North American Studies*).
- Dr Sam Edwards (Manchester Metropolitan University).
- Professor Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Stanford University).
- Professor Paul Giles (University of Sydney).
- Professor Michael Heale (Lancaster University).
- John Horne (University of Birmingham).
- Professor Richard H. King (University of Nottingham; BAAS Chair, 1992-1995).
- Dr Ben Marsh (University of Stirling).
- Dr Catherine Morley (University of Leicester).
- Professor Simon Newman (University of Glasgow; BAAS Chair, 2004-2007).
- Dr Rachel Ritchie (Brunel University).
- Kathryn Rose (Microform Academic Publishers).
- Michael Scott-Kline (Fulbright Commission).
- Professor Howard Temperley (University of East Anglia; BAAS Chair, 1986-1989).
- Sue Wedlake (Embassy of the United States, London).

10.3. Events

- Research seminar at the University of East Anglia, involving faculty and postgraduate students, 12 October 2011.

- Panel discussion at the BAAS postgraduate conference at the University of Birmingham, 12 November 2011, featuring Dr Jenny Barrett (Edge Hill University), Dr Michael Collins (University of Nottingham), Professor Martin Halliwell (University of Leicester), and Dr Helen Laville (University of Birmingham).
- Presentation at the BAAS Annual General Meeting at the University of Manchester, 13 April 2012.

10.4. Author

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