About

The Department of American Ethnic Studies at the University of Washington was founded in 1985, at the conclusion of a two-year process that resulted in the reorganization of three programs (Afro-American Studies, Asian-American Studies, and the Center for Chicano Studies) that had existed as semi-autonomous units since the early 1970s. Currently, AES counts fifteen full-time members in its faculty, including four that hold joint appointments in Anthropology; Law, Societies, & Justice; Psychology; and Spanish & Portuguese Studies. In addition, all AES tenure-line professors hold adjunct appointments in other departments. Conversely, many colleagues from across campus also hold adjunct or affiliate appointments in AES.

Grounded on a multicultural, interdisciplinary, and intersectional approach, our program is distinguished by its strong focus on issues of social justice, equality, and civil and human rights—especially as this pertains to those U. S. groups that have been historically subjected to exclusion and marginalization. As a multidisciplinary program, the fields we cover in our research and teaching include Cultural Studies, Film Studies, History, Immigration, Labor Studies, Literature, Sociology, Visual Cultures, and Women Studies. Accordingly, many of our courses are cross-listed, or jointly offered, with other departments—Anthropology, Communication, History, Political Science, Sociology, Spanish, and Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, among others. In addition, we offer courses in Swahili and Tagalog languages.

AES undergraduate majors may apply to join the Honors Program. Those admitted have the opportunity to conduct an original research project under the direction of a faculty adviser. This is part of our commitment to academic excellence by fomenting the development of critical thinking and the acquisition of excellent writing skills among our students. Other opportunities available for our majors include participation in community-based internships and practicums, independent study, and field research courses. This is congruent with our program's stated focus on social justice, civil and human rights, and community service.

Although AES still is a relatively young department, our alumni have gone on to make significant achievements, to occupy important positions, and to make valuable contributions in diverse spheres of society.

Mission Statement

The Department of American Ethnic Studies (AES) is an innovative unit dedicated to the critical study of race and ethnicity in relation to power. Our academic commitments are grounded in social justice values and practices that seek to eradicate systems of racism and other social, economic, environmental, and political inequalities.

American Ethnic Studies is integrated, conceptually, not by a single academic discipline, but by comparative and interdisciplinary inquiries situated in the lived experiences and histories of communities of color within the borders of the United States as well as larger diasporic and global contexts. Through a rigorous engagement with the theories and methods of
African American Studies, Chicano and Latinx Studies, and Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies, AES cultivates a transformative approach to knowledge, research, teaching, and community collaboration. We explore racial formation in conjunction with an intersectional analysis of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class.

Our integration of theory and praxis is grounded in our work with racial and ethnic communities in the Seattle area, the Northwest region, and beyond. Faculty have collaborated, for example, with the Mayor's Council for African American Elders, the Asian Counseling and Referral Service, OneAmerica, Sea Mar Community Health Centers, the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific Experience, the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute, the Museum of Popular Culture (MoPOP), the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation as well as national and international organizations. We contribute to vital academic and public conversations through our research and teaching by writing articles, reports and books; curating archives and exhibits; producing digital media; planning community-engaged performances, conferences and events; and consulting with local and national organizations about policy and representation.

AES graduates are equipped with a greater capacity for critical thinking and a more nuanced understanding of race as a dynamic axis of power connected to empire and colonialism. We aim to deepen our students' sense of themselves as empowered, socially-engaged members of an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

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Department of American Ethnic Studies
University of Washington
Padelford Hall B-504
Box 354380
Seattle, WA 98195-4380

Phone: (206) 543-5401
Fax: (206) 616-4071
aes@uw.edu

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