

**WORKING  
REMOTELY AS  
PROGRAM  
ASSISTANTS**



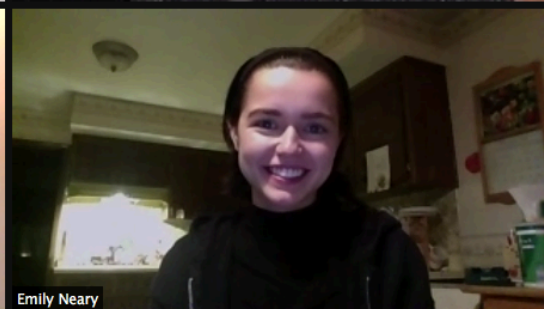
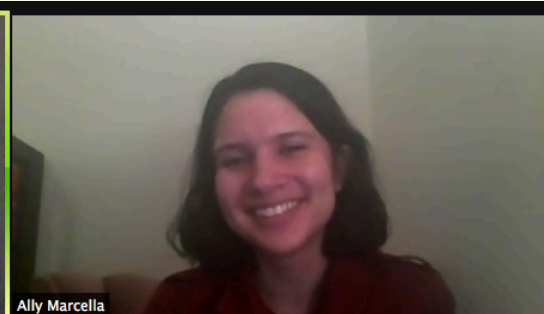
**REFLECTING ON  
A ZOOM  
SENIOR  
SEMINAR**



**REUNITING AMS  
ALUMNI FROM  
2005-2006**

**COPING  
THROUGH  
COVID-19 WITH  
CRAFTING**

# American Studies Newsletter: Zoom Edition



**"Be Vulnerable and Be Bold."  
- Marsha Abrahams, Class of 2005**

## *Welcome to the American Studies Newsletter, Zoom edition!*

I am Allison McCracken, American Studies Director and your host for this meeting, along with our newsletter editor, American Studies senior Reina Ashley Nomura.

There were many ways, tragic and triumphant, in which the past year has been unusual. In discussing our newsletter's theme for this exceptional year, Reina and I found that the common uniting force in the American Studies Program has been teaching, learning, working, and "linking" with each other over the Zoom platform.

American Studies is an interdisciplinary program and we value the community we can create among students from a variety of different departments and with diverse life experiences and interests. American Studies is also a field that foregrounds the importance of life beyond the university, and our classes require students to go out into the community; they use local archives, visit museums and other cultural centers, analyze built environments, attend public lectures, interview people, engage in community service, and participate in activism and political life. Like most DePaul students, they also participate in both paid and unpaid work on and off campus. Thus, the loss of that face-to-face component was daunting at first.



But after the initial shock of the Spring, we all rallied. Community activism over the summer revived many, and as the autumn began, we began to think of how Zoom could bring us together in new ways. This newsletter is the result of our efforts. We begin with our Seniors reflecting on their experience as American Studies majors, including doing their Senior Seminar over Zoom. Normally, the Seminar has ended with public presentations with those friends and family members who could travel to DePaul, but Zoom allowed us to broaden our audience. This year's presentations were able to be viewed around the country, with many family members (including grandparents!), friends, faculty and DePaul alumna attending. These exceptionally strong presentations were recorded and are linked at the conclusion of our interview with Seniors, for all of you to enjoy!

This year also marks our first American Studies Reunion (!!), which would have been impossible without Zoom. On February 11, 2021, five alumnae from 2005-2006 participated in an inspiring discussion of their lives since graduation. They have had disparate and changing experiences, and they were very excited to share their lives with each other and with our students. Reina has excerpted this hour-long discussion below, but newsletter readers can watch the full video by using the link provided at the start of the article.

This year has also been one that saw many engage in new crafting activities that did not involve screen time. Our editor, Reina, was one of them, and in her essay here, she provides an insightful discussion on the significance of these crafted objects.

It is our hope that readers will be as impressed and enlightened by the work and life stories of our amazing students and alums as we have been. This year has been one like no other, and we are so grateful to have their voices as a living archive.

**Editor's Note: We have made an intentional approach to design this newsletter with accessibility in mind. We hope that this newsletter's layout does not inhibit anyone's ability to access it, and recognize that there is still room for improvement.**

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome from Director, Dr. Allison McCracken.....	2
Working Remotely as AMS Program Assistants.....	3
Reflecting on a Zoom Senior Seminar .....	4
Coping Through COVID-19 with Crafting.....	8
Reuniting AMS Alumni From 2005-2006.....	10

This Newsletter was produced and designed by Reina Ashley Nomura, with editorial and production assistance from Allison McCracken, Hannah Boardman, and Anya Paluch.



## Working Remotely as AMS Program Assistants

With the coronavirus pandemic moving us to Zoom for classes, it has also moved student assistants to working from home. American Studies Program Assistants, Hannah Boardman and Anya Paluch, shared their thoughts on working remotely for the Program during the past year.

**Anya Paluch, right, she/hers, third year student majoring in American Studies and minoring in Psychology. [apaluch1@depaul.edu](mailto:apaluch1@depaul.edu)**

**Hannah Boardman, below, she/hers, third year student majoring in Public Relations and Advertising. [hboardma@depaul.edu](mailto:hboardma@depaul.edu)**

Hannah's been working as an American Studies (AMS) Program Assistant since September of 2019, so she has been working remotely longer than she had been in person. Upon reflection, Hannah says, "It's not as challenging as I would have thought. At the beginning it was stressful to figure out zoom for work on top of school, but now we have the hang of it and I am enjoying it. It is so nice to see everyone's faces every week (like Anya and Dr. McCracken)." Both Hannah and Anya do feel the extra loneliness that comes with remote work. Hannah misses "seeing everyone on the 5th floor of the SAC [because] the community is so unique and everybody gets to know one another." Anya started working as an AMS Program Assistant in Spring 2020, so her entire work experience has been completely remote. While she says that "I like it a lot, being able to work from my bed and have snacks and tea whenever I want!," she also notes that "I miss seeing people and working with and talking to them in person."



Remote work brought new tasks and activities, and Hannah and Anya have accomplished a lot while working online in the past year. In particular, they have focused in on activities to help build community so that AMS students would not feel so isolated. Every week, they produce an AMS Bulletin, where they share AMS-related University events, program announcements, and recommendations (like Anya's hot chocolate recipe). They have held quarterly community events for AMS students and created a Slack for them to more easily communicate with each other. In December, they created the very first [American Studies Student Guide](#), a handbook for AMS students to navigate the program more easily. [Editor's note: I'm also grateful to them both for their assistance in putting this newsletter together! I wouldn't have been able to do it without their collaborative efforts!]

While the desire to work in-person again is clear, Hannah and Anya also share a hesitation towards it. They both note their worries about getting sick or spreading COVID-19 to someone else. Hannah mentioned that "I want to make sure everyone I would be working around is vaccinated (including me)." Anya also expressed some concern that working in person might lead to "not having as much time for myself and [having] to go back to commutes and running late and things like that." Considering that both Hannah and Anya are now experienced with remote work, they share some ideas for what aspects they'd want to leave behind and what aspects they'd want to continue, once they return to campus. Hannah notes that the technical side of working remote adds an extra step for her: "The camera on my computer broke during spring quarter 2020 and I have had to use an external one since." She also wants to be done with "having to email people [she works] with just to ask a simple question, sitting in one chair all day." Thinking about things to keep doing in an in-person work environment, Hannah really likes the idea of keeping up the weekly bulletin. For Anya, having the ease of communicating with others through Zoom and other remote platforms has been helpful, and she hopes that some of that can continue in the future.



## *Reflecting on a Zoom Senior Seminar*

### Concentrations:

**Emily Neary:** Politics, Institutions, and Values

**Lydia Tortolero:** Politics, Institutions, and Values

**Ally Marcella:** Politics, Institutions, and Values + Double Major in Music

**Quinn Tessman:** Pop Culture & Media + Minor in Museum Studies

**Lonnae Hickman:** Pop Culture & Media + Double Major in Theater Arts

**Reina Ashley Nomura:** Material Culture and Built Environment + Minor in LGBTQ+ Studies

### Seminar Project Topics:

**Emily:** Wrestling with Reality: World Wrestling Entertainment, Reality TV, and the Persona of Donald Trump

**Lydia:** Ethnic Studies: Social Justice Teaching and Radical Equality in Education

**Ally:** Labor as a Virtue: The Poorhouse in Antebellum New York

**Quinn:** Let's Get One Thing Straight: The Professional De-Queering of Joanne Woodward

**Lonnae:** Lingering Blackface in The Modern American Music Industry and Pop Culture

**Reina:** D2L, Mental Illness, and Accessibility: Investigating the Ableist Structures of Learning Management Systems in Higher Education

### How did you choose your project idea?

**Emily:** During quarantine, my friend and I became obsessed with the insanely odd and shocking world of professional wrestling. At first, I was interested in the gender dynamics of wrestling performances, but I couldn't develop a strong enough argument to form a paper. The more I looked into World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), and the more I noticed Trump's involvement with the sports-entertainment brand, I realized how much WWE's brand influenced Trump and his rhetoric.

**Lydia:** Through panic, probably? No, I mean, that's how it started. I wanted to get into something different but that was still in the field of education – I started a topic around migrant workers and education, but there's so little research on that. So I just expanded on what I was passionate about and what I've been doing for the last four years, and that's how I chose it. I think I was cleaning my bookshelf or reorganizing my books and it just kind of reminded me of what got me interested in what I studied, which was social justice education.



Emily Neary

**Lonnae:** I've always kind of wanted to do something about the ways in which Black people are affected by popular culture. My freshman year, I had a theater class, and we didn't talk about blackface, which I thought was fundamentally important when talking about theater, so I was like "ok, this is an issue." I made this whole PowerPoint presentation about it and I presented it to my teacher, and he let me use it, and after that I kind of became super fascinated with blackface. I kept coming back to it. When it came time to choosing a topic, I was super interested in music because I had just taken a black music class with Amor Kholi, so I was like "ok, I love black music and I want to do something about music, but I also want to do something about blackface." Considering the recent stuff that had happened with Black Lives Matter and a lot of black people being shot, I wanted to do something about the effect of popular culture on Black people and then it just kind of came from that.



Lonnae Hickman

**What was capstone like via Zoom?**

**Emily:** I've always liked online classes, so I didn't mind Zoom capstone. I definitely preferred Zoom presentations since you can't see everyone staring at you. Plus, you can hide behind your slides. :)

**Quinn:** I went into it like, "Well, I'm with the smart people. I'm not as smart as them!" But I know that everyone else was probably freaking out as well. I guess it was kind of harder to get to know each other because it's not like right before class, where you can chat with people. I think it took us a little bit more time to get comfortable with one another.

**Lonnae:** I think it actually would have been harder for me if it was in person. I really liked Capstone over Zoom because I felt like it gave me more time to do stuff. And I really liked presenting over Zoom because I feel like if I would have presented it in person it would have been 10 times as hard for me.

**Any advice/tips for future senior seminar students?**

**Emily:** Pick a topic you're passionate about for your paper. There's lots of research involved, so you have to want to stay engaged in your topic, or the paper will be a struggle.

**Ally:** Just start thinking about ideas before you get there.

**Quinn:** Know that you are ready.

**Lonnae:** Know what topic you kind of want to do before going to the class. Really think about the topic you're choosing and the weight which you are choosing, because with mine I didn't quite realize what I was getting into until I started doing the research and then I was like, "oh this is bad this is really difficult for me to research." So, know your topic, know what you're getting into, and don't skimp on the research.

**Most memorable AMS course? Most memorable DePaul course?**

**Emily:** For AMS, *History of Sex in America II*. I loved the readings and videos in this class; they always led to interesting discussions. Allison is the best teacher, and she makes sure that people drop their opinions/judgements about the subject matter and think critically. Generally speaking, *Religion and the U.S. Constitution*. This class introduced me to writing case briefs and the variety of constitutional interpretations. Overall, this course sparked my interest in constitutional law, which I'm considering pursuing in the future.

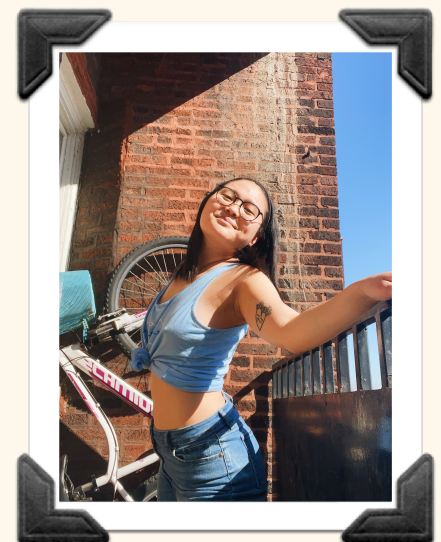
**Ally:** *Public Policy and Poverty or Slavery, Race, and Religion*

**Lonnae:** *What is Black Cinema?* with Poe Johnson. It probably taught me the most about pop culture cinema, and the way in which black people are affected. I think it's my best, my favorite class just because of all the movies we got to watch, which were amazing, but also the paper that he let us write.

**Favorite part of American Studies major?**

**Emily:** It's the inherently interdisciplinary structure of the major. I wasn't stuck taking required classes that I had no interest in. I was able to study across a variety of disciplines, like media, history, law, politics, and creative courses. You create your own major, in a sense.

**Reina:** Besides the freedom of essentially designing my own major, the thing I love most about American Studies is that it's taught me to constantly ask questions about things. Pursuing an American Studies degree means that you get to explore the topics you're really interested in, and this learning environment matched my wide range of academic interests and encouraged me to ask questions of them, whether it was about education, mental health, disability studies, physical and virtual spaces,



Reina Ashley Nomura



or a combination of them. I loved how I was really able to chart my own path.

### Post-grad adventures? Goals/hopes for the future?

**Emily:** Nothing exciting. Currently nannying until I can find an adult job. Eventually, I hope to escape frigid Chicago and settle somewhere warm, or at least much less cold. Also, I hope to write some short stories worthy of publishing.

**Ally:** A few things are up in the air. I'm either thinking about doing some kind of job in some sort of political research centered around anti-corruption reform or democracy reform since I have a lot of experience in that at this point. I worked for a campaign for a state anti-gerrymandering amendment and I have also worked with a national group called RepresentUs, and I have been talking to them about a possible job (I was an intern for them). I have also applied to grad schools for public policy since I am kind of leaning towards political research or policy research.



Ally Marcella

**Quinn:** Over break I applied to grad school for Museum Studies, so I am hoping to do that and then work in a history museum in collections and management.

**Reina:** Doing my capstone on learning management systems in combination with my student employment job in the Center for Teaching and Learning, I really got interested in the field of Instructional Design and Technology. I've always been interested in the general field of education but I'm starting to find more specifically what part of education I'd like to work in. For now, though, I'm hoping to find a solid job that'll help me move forward, even if it's not specifically in education, so long as it has the transferable skills and experience that I can take with me in the future.

### What do you want from 2021?

**Emily:** A collection of short stories, lots of travel, and returning to pre-quarantine social activities.

**Ally:** It's hard to plan.

**Quinn:** It seems a little hard to focus on the future when I don't know if I'll be able to get outside safely. What's it going to look like a month from now?

**Reina:** I am just hoping by the end of this year I will have some sort of stability whether it's grad school, or a job, or something.



Quinn Tessman

### Latest quarantine comforts?

**Emily:** I moved back in with my dad after graduation, so me and my sisters have been bingeing awful reality shows. The latest we've been watching is *Below Deck*, a series about a yachting crew during charter season.

**Ally:** I hung out and watched *The Sopranos*.

**Quinn:** I watched a lot of JFK assassination documentaries, and I think I solved it, guys.

**Lonnae:** I allowed myself to be unproductive because I realized that was something I needed to work on. I have found comfort in watching TV, I watched some great ones, some not so much. I just finished

watching *Bridgerton*, I did not like it! There are some terrible issues with consent in that show, which is just kind of disturbing, that in 2020, we're still doing this. I have been watching *Schitt's Creek* and *Lovecraft Country*, which I love.

**Current favorite song?**

**Emily:** Ahhhhhhhh, always the most difficult question. Lately, I've been throwing it back to my childhood music roots. So, I'd have to say it's a tie between "A Place for My Head" by Linkin Park or "U Not Like Me" by 50 Cent.

**Reina:** Everyone here knows because I've mentioned it so many times, but I became a One Direction fan over quarantine, so I've been listening to a lot of One Direction. Pretty much all their albums, but mostly *Midnight Memories* and *Four*. One of my friends sends me two new songs a day to listen to by artists I'm unfamiliar with and that's been pretty cool, too.

**Final Thoughts? Recommendations for AMS majors?**

**Emily:** Thanks to Reina for these questions and always keeping in touch. Thanks to the AMS department for providing me with a major that gave me the freedom to dabble in every discipline my indecisiveness was interested in. And take Allison McCracken's courses.

**Lydia:** I think I'd say don't intimidate yourself. Just the idea of a capstone and knowing how important it is and that you have this huge presentation, it's easy to over analyze things. But you're just doing what you've been studying, just more independently. So that's why it made me scared, a little bit. But once we got through it, it was like "Oh, yeah."

**Reina:** As much as I'm ready to not be in school anymore, I'm going to miss the AMS community, especially since it was just a lot harder to get together because of COVID. I'm hopeful, though, that we'll all get to see each other in person someday soon. As for recommendations, I'd say keep your eye out for cross-listed courses and classes in other departments. The beauty of American Studies is that if there's a class in WRD, Sociology, Communication Studies, or anything that's not on the list of AMS classes for some reason, but you think it'd fit into your specific American Studies degree, it's worth asking if that'll work out. I love that I've then been able to make connections with faculty members from a variety of departments, simply because I've taken their courses to shape my American Studies degree.



Lydia Tortolero

**Watch the senior seminar presentations here: [Senior Seminar Zoom Presentations Google Drive Link](#)**



## Coping Through COVID-19 with Crafting

By: Reina Ashley Nomura

March 17, 2021

At the time of writing, we have now surpassed over one year of living in a pandemic. With social distancing rules in place, many - if not all - of our social interactions have moved online to a virtual space. With so many of our daily activities, whether it's school, work, or even chatting with family and friends, now taking place online, many people have turned distinctly to non-digital crafting as a way to cope while living through a COVID-19 world. In early 2020 when the pandemic was still new, several articles were written about

the rise in crafting arts. Many wrote about their own experiences, noting how craft arts have historically been used to cope during traumatic times or how they have been shown to have health benefits. I wanted to take this topic and add my own, American Studies spin on how it's not just the act of crafting that's important, but also the physical creations that have been made because of the crafting.

This quarter, I took Prof. Amy Tyson's history course, *Introduction to Public History: Museums, Memory, and Material Culture*, that discussed material culture history, or in other words, the historical significance of seemingly "mundane" objects. We learned about how objects are more than what they seem to be: a lunchbox, a camera, a sewing machine, a stuffed animal - they all tell stories about the people these items belonged to, and of the larger culture and society that these people lived in.



From the lessons in this class, I realized that the crafts that people are making during COVID as a coping mechanism are more than just a coping or healing tool - it's history in the making. These crafts are inherently different from crafts that were made in a pre-COVID world or crafts that will be made in a "post-COVID" world because they tell stories that trace back to our collective experiences of living during this COVID-19 pandemic. These handmade crafts act as a tangible manifestation of the pain, sadness, fear, and hope that people have been feeling the past year. They also act as symbols of connection, community, and solidarity. And the tangible, "you can hold it in your hands" aspect of these crafts is crucial, too. One article discussed how making something with your hands helps to build self-esteem. In a world where physical touch is lost and even dangerous, that self-esteem boost is an act of survival.

Curious to see how people in my community have turned to crafting as a way to cope during this time, I created a survey to collect some responses. The photos on these pages are from the





submissions to this form. While some started crafting recently, others have “made 6 baby blankets during the pandemic.” Here are some of the responses:

**why did you make this item?**

“Trying to make my home office look more homey”

“I’m trying to have more hobbies that don’t involve staring at a screen because that’s all I feel like I do these days. Knitting is really good for my fidgety hands!”

“I was super bored and going stir crazy, I needed something simple/continuous that I could hyper focus on and enjoy for what it was.”

“My friends and family made new humans! And I’ve been making baby blankets for new Earth entrants for many years.”

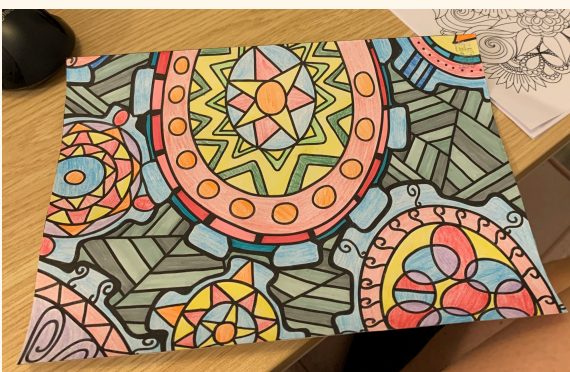
**did making this item help you cope during covid? how so?**

“Definitely. It gave me something where I could see visible progress and I had control over. I use it as a means of relaxing while also seeing myself as productive in some sense!”

“I think it did! Knitting allows me to focus on something tangible and it’s reassuring in some ways to take on a project where I know the final result since our current future is so uncertain.”

“Got me to log off my phone for huge chunks of time and connect with music again”

Whether the crafted item was for oneself or a gift, made with yarn, thread, or coloring pencils, they all tell a stories about people’s experiences with COVID. For me, I found that coloring cleared my mind and gave a moment of peace amidst the chaos of the past year and the daily zoom fatigue of working and schooling from home. These pieces of craft arts might initially seem like “childhood fun and games,” but they’re not. They are physical creations of how we’re dealing with these times. They’re connected to the historical moment, to people’s memory of this time in their lives. And that’s significant. That’s powerful.



## *Reuniting AMS Alumni From 2005-2006*



**Note:** this interview has been excerpted from the full interview transcript, and edited for length and clarity. The full video interview is linked here: [Alumni Reunion Zoom Google Drive Link](#)

*On a Thursday night in February, Dr. McCracken and I gathered a group of American Studies alumni from the classes of 2005 and 2006. After brief introductions and light chatting, I dove into questions about their time at DePaul, their time since DePaul, and what words of wisdom they might have for current AMS students.*

Starting off the discussion, I asked all the alumni how they first found their way into American Studies. Ben Thrutchley began: "I started out in Political Science. I knew I wanted to do political science going into university and then I ended up taking one class with Allison. I basically knew from there that I was going also do American Studies. It was a great combination and they reinforced each other." The rest quickly chimed in:

Lindsay Giggey: I had a really weird route. I'm a first-generation college [student], so my parents didn't really have any sense of what it's like to go to college or how you pick your major. They wanted me to major in something that had a job attached to it, so if I were to be a psychology major, I would be a psychologist. I actually came in wanting to do education, and then decided that I didn't want to deal with the parents of children, so then I was pretty lost. I was also in the Honors Program and I remember having a conversation with [Honors advisor] Nancy Grossman about what to do. I told her I was thinking about transferring and she said, "Why don't you just do one of your Honors electives, and just feel some things out." And so Allison had the *TV and American Culture* class and I'm like, "Oh I love TV, this will be fun!" And I just remember, by the end of the class knowing, "Oh, this is something I need to know more about because this class makes me feel warm inside."





**Name:** Renee Fetty

**Pronouns:** she/hers

**Current location:** Woodstock, IL

**Hometown:** Chicago

**Graduation Year:** 2005

**Notable postgraduate degrees:** MBA, Loyola University

**Current position:** Stay at home mom; soon to be returning to the workforce after an almost 3 year hiatus

**Most memorable DePaul class:** Any class with Allison! There was a project where we did something with music... our group focused on Dolly Parton, and I totally saw her private and public persona, and her music in a new light. She is a treasure.

**What TV show/movie/podcast/book/activity/tip is your #1 recommendation:** Shows - Ted Lasso, Schitts Creek, Last Week Tonight. Reading - Anti-Racism Daily (newsletter via Nicole Cardoza)

**Name:** Sarah Ebel

**Pronouns:** she/hers

**Current location:** Chicago

**Graduation Year:** 2005

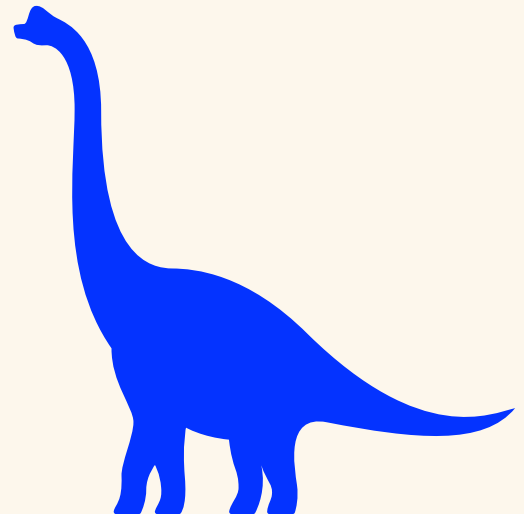
**AMS concentration/double major/minor:** Double Major with History, Minor in Anthropology

**Notable postgraduate degrees:** MA in American Studies, University of Delaware; JD, DePaul University

**Current position:** Assistant General Counsel at the Field Museum

**Most memorable DePaul class:** Definitely the AMS Capstone! It was a great opportunity to dive into a topic that fascinated me, and to hear about my classmate's similarly fascinating topics.

**Major personal hobbies or interests:** I'm playing a lot of Stardew Valley; it's very soothing.



**Name:** Ben Thrutchley

**Pronouns:** he/him

**Current location:** Seattle

**Graduation Year:** 2006

**AMS concentration/double major/minor:** Double Major with Political Science

**Current position:** Manager (government relations communications), Kaiser Permanente

**Most memorable DePaul class:** Allison's class on television

**Major personal hobbies or interests:** My pitbull! Her name is Lyra!



Marsha Abrahams: Yeah, the thing about the American Studies curriculum that was so fascinating to me was it was everything I would have put together in my fantasy. It was like, "Well, I want to do this, and I'm going to do this and this," and then they said, "Oh there's a thing for that. It's called American Studies." It just opened so many doors for me in terms of thinking about learning in new and different ways, outside of educational norms, connecting dots, and coming up with new ideas. It wasn't just a matter of memorizing other people's information, it was about thinking for myself. And I think that it attracts people who are intelligent, and engaged, and want to learn, and want to grow. And that's true of everyone on this call, because I know everybody here.

Renee Fetty: I actually was a transfer student. I came to DePaul as a sophomore and none of my credits transferred. I was studying classical music, I was trying to get into the music program here, and I was not happy. I thought, "Okay, maybe I can do something with History," but it seemed so stuffy. I was also not living on campus and I was a commuter student, so I think my whole experience was really, really different. And to Marsha's point, [American Studies] made you think analytically and critically about things. I just thought it was fun. It wasn't as stuffy or as narrow-focused as some more history-focused classes that I was taking, so it was just way more interesting to me at that point. And then I thought, "Okay, I can do this, this I can do."

Sarah Ebel: I switched around a lot and had pretty much settled on History. And then I took one of Professor Burton's classes, which was my first AMS class. And I got really excited that you could use things that weren't books as primary sources, and it was like Marsha said, it just opened up all these doors for me. But it was reinforcing the things that I liked about history and giving me new tools to look at things I was studying in other classes. It fit so nicely with everything else that I was interested in, and then there were all these very smart, engaged people who were interested in totally different, very weird, but very cool things, that I got to learn alongside of, so it was just a great program.

*With everyone back in their undergraduate selves, I had them reflect and share some memories of their time at DePaul that stood out. Whether it was a particular class or quality time with one another, the one point that everyone touched on was the sense of community that American Studies fostered for them. Living in a world where closeness is now dangerous and community is accessible only virtually, I realized how powerful it is to have such strong memories of laughter, conversations, and fun while in college.*

Sarah shared first, explaining that for her, Senior Seminar was a really memorable class: "Well, I still think about my American Studies Capstone all the time, which was about Mars colonization. It was just a really fun class where you get to dive into something that fascinated you. And it was the highlight of my time at DePaul, being able to do that kind of original research into a topic that fascinated me." It appeared that it wasn't only Sarah who remembered Senior Seminar because Lindsay responded with, "I think about your Mars colonization paper, still!"

For those of us who are unfamiliar with Mars colonization, I had Sarah explain a little bit for me: "I was looking at how people use the history of the American West as a metaphor for colonizing Mars. It's still relevant, I mean you've got Bezos and Elon Musk trying to start space libertarianism out there and this is going on into the future."

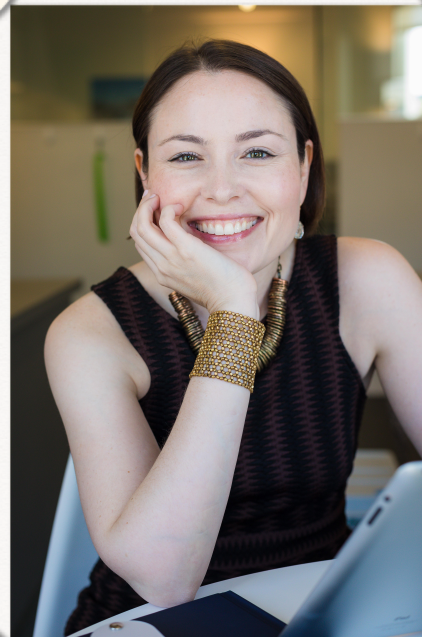
The rest of the group shared community experiences that were outside the classroom as well. Renee remembers "being able to hang out with people outside of class, and also doing class-related things like watching movies and talking about them in an intellectual way. Because I didn't live on campus, that was a big deal for me. And we all had a lot of the same classes, so we were always around each other. It was just a nice sense of community and camaraderie. Lindsay and I even had an independent study together." This sparked an excited response from Lindsay: "We did! We did teen TV! That was so fun, I almost forgot about that!"

For Lindsay, it wasn't until she found herself in the American Studies Program that she felt like she was part of something at DePaul. She explains, "We were all interested in really weird stuff, but we were all super excited about the weird stuff that we were into. It was just so refreshing to be around real people who actually cared about learning and were curious, which was not always my experience at DePaul because I commuted, too, and it was so hard to



**Name:** Lindsay Giggey  
**Pronouns:** she/hers  
**Current location:** Long Beach, CA  
**Hometown:** Streamwood, IL  
**Graduation Year:** 2005  
**AMS concentration/double major/minor:**  
 Concentration in Popular Culture  
**Notable postgraduate degrees:** PhD in Cinema & Media Studies, UCLA, 2017; MA in Cinema & Media Studies, UCLA, 2010  
**Most memorable DePaul class:** Allison's *TV and American Identity* class. It showed me that people were thinking about television in a critical way-- which I was already doing on my own--and that it was actually a worthy topic. And not just television, but reality television! Taking this class kicked off the past 15+ years of my life.  
**Major personal hobbies or interests:** cooking, baking, yoga, bullet journaling  
**Preferred social platform or Emoji:** Emojis - the dinosaurs and the whales.  
**What TV show/movie/podcast/book/activity/tip is your #1 recommendation right now:** TV - *The Queen's Gambit* and *Top of the Lake* (which I've just finally watched). And my upcoming show, *For Real: The Story of Reality TV*, premiering March 25.

**Name:** Marsha Abrahams  
**Pronouns:** she/hers  
**Current location:** San Francisco  
**Hometown:** Chapel Hill, NC  
**Graduation Year:** 2005  
**AMS concentration/double major/minor:**  
 Concentration in Material Culture, Double Major with Sociology  
**Notable postgraduate degrees:** MA in American Studies, University of Texas, Austin  
**Current position:** Residential Real Estate Agent  
**Most memorable DePaul class:** *Sociology of Celebrity*. The focus of the course was interrogating the function of celebrity— ideas that are now instrumental to shaping every aspect of our culture. I would love to retake that class in today's day and age!  
**Major personal hobbies or interests:** Photography, great phone conversations with old friends, fashion, my cocker spaniel puppy (Eleanor), baking bread for people and leaving it on their doorsteps, and coffee with excessive amounts of caffeine.  
**What TV show/movie/podcast/book/activity/tip is your #1 recommendation:** Podcast - *How I Built This* (NPR). Always inspiring and a good reminder that things don't always go as planned; but our perceived "failures" often turn into some of our biggest successes. Activity - Mediation in the great outdoors. Show - *Schitt's Creek* (pretty sure everyone already knows that one)



forge any kind of relationship. Now, I've been teaching college students and explaining my American Studies background by saying, 'Yeah, I got to pick my own major and I got to just do whatever I wanted.'

Ben added to the conversation by bringing up an activity that many of us probably are missing a lot of lately and that is watching movies with friends. He said, "I can't even remember what we watched, but it was at Marsha's apartment on her big screen. She had a big projector pulldown screen, and we would go over there to watch different movies or shows, and then talk about them. I have vivid memories of that and how much I enjoyed it." Allison chimed in here too, mentioning the great food that Marsha would always have out for everyone. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a tiny bit envious because simply listening to all of these memories made it sound so fun.

*Having spent some time reminiscing on college days, I asked the group how studying American Studies has influenced who and where they are today. It was amazing to hear the wide range of experiences that can follow an American Studies degree and as I near my own graduation, it was reassuring and comforting.*

This time, Lindsay started the conversation off, talking about how American Studies empowered her to pursue her passion of American culture and reality TV: "I mean, just coming out of American Studies, where everything is really independently focused, I knew how to put together my own program, how to get what I wanted out of everything that I was taking, and how to find connections between things that didn't necessarily seem to go together. I got a master's and then a doctorate at UCLA, where my project was on reality TV and celebrity and labor. One of my very best friends from graduate school went into the entertainment world. He introduced me to somebody he had worked with, and through them I got the opportunity to help develop a documentary series about the history of reality TV. Right before COVID happened, I got hired to do research for them. The show drops on E! on March 25 after the Kardashians are wrapped, and I can't wait! It's a show that I helped write and then research and helped shape, so that's pretty exciting." [Find out more about Lindsay's upcoming documentary **For Real: The Story of Reality TV** at this link: [https://www.eonline.com/shows/for\\_real](https://www.eonline.com/shows/for_real)].

Lindsay passed it to Sarah by saying, "Every time I go to O'Hare, I pass the giant dinosaur and go, 'Oh my God, Sarah is that dinosaur's lawyer' and I really want to hear about how you're a dinosaur lawyer." Sarah laughed: "It was a twisty path to becoming a dinosaur lawyer. After I graduated from DePaul, I wanted to do more Material Culture Studies, so I ended up at the Winterthur program in American Material Culture out at the University of Delaware. It was another place where there was a small cohort of very interesting people who are all interested in the same weird things that I was [interested in], so it was just a really fabulous time. That program is heavily art history and stewardship of decorative arts, but I was able to carve a path that was a little off center and I ended up studying stereographic views of various places, including Sears, Roebuck and Co.

I ended up coming back to Chicago and worked at a historic house museum for about four years and thought about going to graduate school to get a PhD. I applied and did not get in, which is the best thing that has ever happened to me. I decided to go to law school and actually ended up at DePaul Law for that. They have a very good art law program with Professor Patty Gerstenblith, who is a big name in the field. I was able to fit my arts background within a law degree and that worked out really well. I interned at the Field Museum my last semester - they needed to hire somebody, and I was right there. It was the right time, with the right people, right skill set, and that was six years ago now. It's worked out pretty well, even though I never ever had any kind of plan whatsoever. I'll throw it to Marsha."

Marsha: It's such a meandering path. I tend to be a person who just kind of does what fascinates them, so I went to graduate school after DePaul at UT - Austin and got a Master's in American Studies. I graduated right during the last recession and I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do. And I think at that time I knew I didn't want to continue in academics, because I didn't feel like that was my personal path as much as I love and appreciate it. I ended up working in marketing for a while, working with my family for a while, which in itself can be incredibly challenging at times and satisfying at other times. And about four years ago, I decided to take a pretty big career path change and became a real estate agent, which I love. I had thought about it for a long time, and I've been living in San Francisco and I just said, "I'm doing it." And I have not looked back.



Ben: For me, American Studies has been absolutely critical because Political Science, the other major that I had, was really great about giving you government structures and a lot of political philosophy. But when you're in politics and when you're in communications that are focused on politics, you really need to understand the greater context of the people that you're actually communicating with and that's where American Studies really comes in handy. And so, when I talk to people these days, I lean on my American Studies degree way more than I lean on my Political Science degree because most of the time, I have to understand the broader cultural pieces more than what political science tends to focus on. Today, I work for Kaiser Permanente, the largest private nonprofit health care provider in the country. I specifically work on government relations communications, anything that has to do with communicating our policy positions and, a lot of times, our values, to Washington, to state legislators, and things like that. So, American Studies has been critical for me and I'm so glad that I took it.

Renee: I have a very meandering story, just like everybody else. I think I was definitely more behind in terms of like, "What am I going to do with my life? Who am I as an individual?" I didn't know what I was doing when I graduated, so I had a really hard time, and I was struggling like "what do I do?" I ended up working at Starbucks and they had great benefits. I was there a long time and saw a lot of changes, and it was really good to work in a service industry and just get that work experience and then I thought, "Okay, I need to go back to school." So, I went and got my MBA. For me, all of the American Studies writing that we did, all the research, all of the critical thinking, and trying to take a big picture and narrow it down or make it so people can understand in a concise way, all of that really came back for me. Once I graduated, I ended up finding startups because helping businesses succeed seemed to be what I wanted to do. I was really into the beer industry for a while, so I was working at a brewery and helped start a brew pub that's still up and running. I got married. I love all my restaurant people and friends, but it's a different lifestyle. I ended up finding this very small, woman owned company. I was doing marketing and communications and thinking about "how do you get the information across to your audience?" That's where American Studies has done really great things for me, just in terms of communication style. Then I got pregnant, and we ended up moving – that was three years ago.

*Nearing the end of the night, I had one final question to ask: "What kind of advice would you give to AMS students? You can direct it just in general or to graduating seniors like me!"*

Marsha started off by saying that if she could give her younger self some advice it would be "don't expect anything to be laid out for you. No one's gonna hand you something that's right for you. I would say follow the things that excite you because then you'll be wanting to go to work every day and you're going to grow whatever career that is into something that, even though it's not perfect, is going to fulfill you in ways that otherwise won't. People have very dynamic careers that span all kinds of different topics and educational paths, so don't feel limited, don't feel like you have to go into something that you think is a direct correlation of your education. Just be bold and be willing to go in and say, 'I'm excited about this, I'm willing to work hard, I'm going to prove it to you,' and be confident."

*The rest of the group each added their own words of wisdom and the underlying theme to all of them was that no one really knows what they're doing, but they find a path that works out alright. Even though they weren't straightforward directions to how to win at life, hearing their advice was comforting.*

Ben said, "I would say take advantage of the critical thinking training that you get through American Studies and being at university. I agree with Marsha - you don't have to go down any particular path. And as long as you are a good thinker, and hopefully, can write pretty well – because that tends to be useful across a lot of different things – and you are curious, and willing to put yourself out there, you're going to be able to get a good job and really make a career for yourself."

Renee chimed in to say, "Use your resources. Just go on LinkedIn because all of those connections, you don't know when they're going to come back. So, use your university, use your teachers, use your advisors, use all of those connections. It really helps and I think for a lot of people that's the way they get jobs. It's not about going and asking someone specifically for a job, it's about reconnecting with someone and saying: "How are you? What's going on?"

Hey, by the way, I'm looking, I'm interested, so if you know anyone send them my way." And, I think with the community that AMS creates for the students, you can just like snowball that. I wish I had done it more so I'm saying just do it."

Renee's advice prompted Ben to add, "Something that was so important in my early career was keeping in touch with a couple of my really good friends who also came to Washington DC at about the same time. And then, one of my other good friends came and I heard about a job opportunity at one of the consulting agencies that I worked with and I was like, 'go after that' and helped get him a job. And then he later helped me get a job. And so those relationships are so important, keeping in touch with people and building what I call is 'good job karma.'"

Marsha added on to Ben's comment, sharing, "The narrative we tell ourselves is that the job search should be linear -- you follow the rules, and these are the steps, and in most professions that's not really how it works. You have to be willing to put yourself out there and say, 'Hey, I'm really interested in this, if you know of any opportunities I'd love to talk to so and so...' and it feels vulnerable to do that, but it is so worth it. Because you can come across one or two generous people who had someone else help them who's willing to say, 'You know what, actually so and so was looking for someone, why don't you call them, and they can meet you for coffee.' And that could make your whole career, that meeting. Be vulnerable and be bold."

Taking the conversation back to AMS, Lindsay noted that: "one of the things that American Studies helped me prepare for was to pivot. I've had several very different careers already and I find that I know what my set of skills are. Once you identify those, what you're good at, it just becomes a matter of how you sell it and how to do it in different ways and knowing how to talk to people. [For example], I know how to write, and I found that working on the reality tv production, that was really valuable -- the fact that I knew how to write blew everybody's mind."

Sarah seconded Lindsay's advice, adding, "I think one of the things that AMS teaches you is to be adaptable. And also, try a new thing. I think that's really important when you're trying to build a career right now, don't be afraid to try the new thing. You might not have any idea what you want to do, but something sounds interesting, and you think, 'I like it, I have some skills, I can probably do that.' And then if you find out it's not for you at all that is okay, that happens, and you shouldn't be afraid to admit that and pivot. I think that all experience is a good experience in some way. It might be a horrible job but you're going to learn something from that, whether that it's what you don't like, or a specific skill or a new way of interacting and communicating with people that will help you later on. You know your degree, your time in college, your first jobs, they're going to come back in strange, unexpected ways throughout your career. I know 15 years ago I was in one of Allison's classes talking about fandom and you know now, I have a job, where one of the issues I deal with is a dinosaur with a Twitter account!"

*On this topic of advice, we ended our reunion with a group viewing of Baz Luhrmann's inspirational speech to Everybody's Free (To Wear Sunscreen) (2007 Mix) on YouTube, which is linked for your viewing pleasure.*

*Getting this chance to bring this group of friends together again and chat with them was lovely. The way that everyone so quickly reconnected with one another proved to me how special the bond of being in American Studies is. Although right now I'm quite nervous about what the future holds for me, I'm excited to one day be in their shoes, reflecting on my time at DePaul with my AMS friends and giving advice to the American Studies class of 2030.*

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