

THE FIELD

Social thought and political economy (STPEC) is an interdisciplinary undergraduate program for students who want a challenging major. STPEC requirements are drawn from a variety of majors in the humanities and social sciences, including Afro-American studies, anthropology, economics, history, legal studies, political science, sociology, and women, gender, sexuality studies.

The STPEC program encourages students to engage in a critical examination of society and to develop their capacities for critical reading, writing, and thinking. STPEC students cross disciplinary lines to confront fundamental questions often ignored or neglected by traditional academic thought. Many of the issues STPEC students explore involve relations between individuals and society. STPEC courses may deal with issues such as freedom and the state; power relations; structural inequality in the economy; work and work relations; the relationship of Western to non-Western cultures; the intersections of class, race, gender, and sexuality; and theories of social change.

As STPEC students acquire an understanding of social relationships, they frequently develop a need to put their knowledge to work. The program requires students to involve themselves in practice as well as theory by enrolling in internships as part of their undergraduate education. Students are encouraged to participate in UMass Amherst and community affairs and to assume an active responsibility for the shape of their own education within the STPEC program.

There is no minor available in STPEC.

THE MAJOR

Course requirements for STPEC majors are both flexible and highly directed. Students can develop their own individualized courses of study while they acquire a foundation in areas of concentration in the STPEC program. Courses in these areas are chosen from a list of recommended courses available at the STPEC office and on the program website. Transfer students may petition to have courses taken at other institutions accepted for STPEC credit.

Students must take two introductory courses selected from the STPEC course list, one in social theory and one in political economy, before they will be admitted to STPEC's Core Seminar I. Once admitted, students must complete at least 43 credits within the STPEC program. These include one upper- or lower-level history course; one graded internship; STPEC 320: Writing for Critical Consciousness, which fulfills the Junior Year Writing requirement; STPEC 494PI: Praxis, which fulfills the Integrative Experience requirement; and five upper-level courses selected from the STPEC course list, consisting of one course each in the categories of modern social theory and social movements; political economy; women, gender, sexuality studies, and queer theory; history and politics of race in the United States; and non-Western perspectives, global south, and Indigenous people. Students also complete four STPEC seminars: a two-semester core seminar sequence initiating the interdisciplinary study of social and political theory and its application, and two focus seminars providing students the opportunity to engage in intensive study in specific areas of interest decided by the professor and students.

HONORS

Contact the honors program director for information on how to pursue honors opportunities within the major.

STUDY ABROAD

STPEC encourages its students to study abroad and, with program approval, to use courses taken abroad to satisfy STPEC requirements. Students should contact the International Programs Office (413-545-2710, umass.edu/ipo) and work with their academic advisor to choose the appropriate courses in preparation.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

As STPEC is an interdisciplinary program, career opportunities for its graduates vary according to the focus of each student's program of study. Many STPEC graduates continue to law school or to graduate study in fields such as American studies, anthropology, education, economics, history, international relations, labor studies, political theory, social work, and urban planning. Others pursue careers in social service work; teaching; community, grassroots, and labor union organizing; political advocacy; alternative publishing houses and journals; government service; nonprofits; and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Possibilities for employment upon graduation are similar to those available to students graduating from other departments in the social sciences.

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

The social and behavioral sciences focus on behavior and organization from cultural, social, and biological perspectives, examining people as both social and individual beings. Undergraduates in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences study culture, society, and individual and social interaction processes and learn methods by which knowledge in the social and behavioral sciences is created. Students are guided by the SBS Pathways approach, integrating their academic, experiential, and professional pathways. They anchor their knowledge in at least one discipline, but are encouraged to expand this knowledge through various broadening experiences inside and outside the classroom.

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