Facilities and Resources

Bowdoin's Hawthorne-Longfellow Library has developed an extensive collection of books, periodicals, and newspapers published in Asia or addressing Asian countries and cultures. The Asian Studies Program is continually expanding its own audio and video resources for language instruction; many films dealing with Asian societies are available for individual viewing and classroom use.

As a means of broadening students' exposure to Asian cultures, the Asian Studies Program sponsors exhibitions and concerts in visual and performing arts at the College and supports an ongoing student-designed Japanese garden on campus.

Asian countries are home to more than half of the world's population. The Asian Studies Program at Bowdoin seeks to raise students' critical awareness of historical, philosophical, and social issues relevant to the people and cultures of this vast region. In the process, students examine assumptions about their own society—and no participant in an Asian studies course will ever view the world in quite the same way again.

Asian studies draws students and faculty from many departments on campus, offering a wide array of courses on East Asian and South Asian history, religion, government, sociology, anthropology, literature, art, film, and music.

A variety of introductory, mid-level, and advanced courses provides an overview of Asian regions, as well as more specialized study for each area. In addition, language courses form an important part of the Asian studies curriculum. Chinese and Japanese are available from beginning through advanced levels.

The Major and Minor

About thirty students each year choose Asian studies as their major or minor. Students wishing to pursue an Asian studies major focus on the cultural traditions of China, Japan, East Asia, or South Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal). In completing the major, students are required to gain a general understanding of one of these cultural areas, acquire a working proficiency in one of the languages of East or South Asia, develop a theoretical or methodological sophistication, and demonstrate a degree of applied specialization.

The major requires two years of an East Asian language or one year of a South Asian language, or the equivalent through intensive language study. Since Bowdoin does not directly offer courses in a South Asian language, arrangements may be made to transfer credits from another institution or to study Sinhala through Bowdoin's ISLE Program or Tamil through the SITA Program.

Eight additional courses are required for the major, seven of which must focus on the student's area of specialization, including a senior seminar. One course must come from an Asian cultural area outside the student's specialization. Students must take at least one pre-modern and one modern course in their area of specialization. Majors focusing on a discipline in Asian studies—government, history, literature, religion, the humanities and/or social sciences—must take eight relevant courses in addition to the language study requirement.

The minor in Asian studies requires five courses, focusing on China, Japan, or East or South Asia. Students may also pursue a language-focused minor in Chinese or Japanese.

Honors Program

Students contemplating honors candidacy in Asian studies must have established records of A's and B's in program course offerings and present clearly articulated, well-focused proposals for scholarly research. Honors students prepare an honors thesis and are examined orally by the program's faculty.

Study Abroad

Foreign study is highly recommended for students interested in Asian studies. Established programs in the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are available for students interested in China. Students are particularly encouraged to attend the Associated Colleges in China program or the Inter-University Program for Chinese Studies, both of which are in Beijing, or the CET program in Harbin. For students interested in Japan, the Associated Kyoto Program or Japan Center for Michigan Universities in Hikone are recommended, but they may select other programs based upon their academic interests.

The Intercollegiate Sri Lanka Educational Program (ISLE), formally affiliated with the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka, is designed to provide up to two semesters of rigorous intellectual and cultural experience for Asian studies students. Bowdoin also participates in the South India Term Abroad (SITA) program in Tamil Nadu. Students in each of these programs live with host families and tour important archaeological and religious sites within these regions.
Asian Studies

Honors Projects

Recent honors projects completed by majors in the program have included:

- From Demo to the Diet: Political Participation among Postwar Japanese Labor Unions
- Buddhism, Resistance, and Dynastic Legitimacy During the Hulchung Suppression
- Dynamics of Fertility Policy in Japan

Dining tables where only Chinese or Japanese is spoken meet weekly in Thorne Hall and Moulton Union. The Sinhala language dining table meets once per month. The conversation tables are open to all students with facility in the language, and each draws a regular attendance of fifteen to twenty students plus department faculty.

Xiaoje Jia, lecturer in Chinese language, B.A. (Henan), M.A. (Beijing Normal), focuses on language teaching from beginning through advanced study.

Belinda Kong, associate professor of Asian studies and English, B.A. (William and Mary), M.A., Ph.D. (Michigan), teaches Asian American and Asian diaspora literature, as well as contemporary Chinese diaspora fiction.


John C. Holt, William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of the Humanities in Religion and Asian Studies, A.B. (Gustavus Adolphus), A.M. (Graduate Theological Union), Ph.D. (Chicago), teaches courses about Asian religious traditions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as courses on theoretical approaches to the study of religion. He is the founder of the Intercollegiate Sri Lanka Education (ISLE) Program.

Sree Padma Holt, research assistant professor of Asian studies and executive director of the Intercollegiate Sri Lanka Education (ISLE) Program, M.A., Ph.D. (Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, India), teaches courses on Indian gender, religion, literature, politics, and history. She is the author and editor of four books and twenty-three articles published in various national and international journals.


For more information about Bowdoin, please write or call: Dean of Admissions Bowdoin College, 5000 College Station Brunswick, ME 04011-8441 207-725-3100 bowdoin.edu admissions@bowdoin.edu

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For more information, go to: bowdoin.edu/asiastudies/