

# Indian Studies Courses Offered at Universities in the US

**M J Warsi**

India is becoming an increasingly important region to study in the modern, global world because of its importance in the world economy. Domestic businesses have been partnering with call centers, manufacturers and industries in India to bring in profits. Companies of world repute often travel to India for business. Knowledge of the regions cultural practices as well as practical language skills are incredibly useful in today's world, especially for students. It not only makes students more culturally aware in today's global world, but allows for career advancement as well. Every school that does not have a great Indian Studies program should highly consider creating one out of their existing structures.

Harvard University is the oldest university in the United States and has the largest endowment in the country. The university has the Department of Sanskrit and



Indian Studies within the History Department. Harvard can proudly claim that it has had a South Asian department dating back to 1872, when a professor taught courses in Sanskrit as Latin electives. Since then, the course offerings have only grown. The program now offers Hindi-Urdu, as well as Sanskrit. Tamil is another Language dealt in this department. While mostly a graduate program for Ph.Ds, the

department also has undergraduates and graduate students (for a Masters). Obviously Indian Studies has been an integral part to Harvard; otherwise they would not have kept the program for over 100 years. As the leading

school in United States, it is important to note that they have a small, but continually growing Indian Studies program.

Princeton University, the second school in United States, has a vastly different history. Their Program in South Asian Studies is an affiliate with the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies and was started in 2007. Furthermore, students receive a certificate of proficiency in the program, as a part of their regular program in International and Regional Studies. The only language Princeton offers is Hindi. Princeton University's South Asian program is definitely small and still growing. However, it must be kept in mind that the

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program only started a mere four years ago and probably needs time to expand.

**Yale University** has the South Asia Studies Council as a part of the MacMillan Center (of International Studies). Yale had a Sanskrit professor dating back to the early 1900s, but the South Asia Studies Council began in 1990. Undergraduates can participate in the program only as a second major, as an addition to a discipline-based first major. The program offers Hindi, Tamil and Sanskrit as the language options at Yale and has 25 non-language course offerings grounded in South Asia. The program is widely interdisciplinary like most other schools.

**Columbia University** has the South Asia Institute (SAI). The institute covers South Asia as well as adjacent areas, such as Afghanistan, Tibet and Burma. The SAI offers a Masters of Arts Program in South Asian Studies that uses faculty from fourteen different departments. Undergraduates, however, may only take classes about South Asia without receiving a major, minor or certificate. Columbia offers a wide range of languages including Hindi, Urdu, Bengali,

Persian, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil and Tibetan. Columbia's program definitely has room to grow, especially by offering a major or minor for undergraduates. However, it has a strong base (especially with the number of languages offered) for a certification or bachelors of arts program. Stanford University has the Center for South Asia. However, the center does not offer undergraduates majors, minors or certificates in South Asian studies. The center coordinates South Asian events on campus and also provides courses under many different disciplines. The center provides classes in both Hindi and Sanskrit. The history of the center is hard to uncover, but it seems to be a relatively new program.

**University of Chicago**, on the other hand, is renowned for its South Asian program. It has two different but affiliated groups: the Committee on Southern Asian Studies (COSAS) and the South Asia Language and Area Studies (SALAC). COSAS is supported through the University's endowment while the U.S. government funds SALAC. The Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations was founded in

1965 for the students. Undergraduates can undergo major or minor courses in South Asia Languages and Civilizations. Graduate students can pursue South Asian studies through three different schools: Humanities, Social Sciences or Divinity. The Department of South Asian Languages and Cultures provides language courses in Bangla, Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Tibetan, Pali, Sanskrit and Urdu. The University of Chicago has an amazing South Asian studies program for both graduate and undergraduates. It also has great resources including a vast library and research-based committees.

**The University of Pennsylvania** has a historic and well-rounded South Asia Studies Department. Sanskrit was studied at Pennsylvania as early as the 1890s, but it was in the 1930s that the South Asian studies department really took off. Under the leadership of William Norman Brown, the program began to offer more than just the study of Sanskrit. At the University of Pennsylvania, an undergraduate can undergo major or minor courses in South Asian Studies. On the graduate level, Pennsylvania offers both a Master of Arts Program and Doctor of Philosophy program. The department also offers many South Asian languages including Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, Bangla, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Panjabi, Malayalam, Marathi and Gujarati. Students also procure a language certificate in Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Sanskrit, Tamil or Urdu. The University of Pennsylvania's program is very well established.

**Duke University's** program is very different because it is an inter-collegiate program with Duke, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The North Carolina Consortium for South Asia Studies (NCCSAS) promotes South Asian studies amongst undergraduate and graduate students. However, it does not seem like a student can pursue a specific degree through this program.

**Dartmouth College** does not have a specific South Asian Studies department. Instead, it has an Asian and Middle Eastern Studies department with a South

and Southeast Asia concentration. Undergraduate students have to take classes in a variety of South/Southeast Asia courses in anthropology, religion, language and politics. While there is a course about Hindi-Urdu in a cultural sense, there are no language courses. Northwestern University has a very similar program called the Asian & Middle East Studies Program. There is not a specific South Asian Studies department or program. Northwestern offers Hindi as a language, but it is the only South Asian language offered. Both schools could definitely expand their South Asian Studies departments.

**Johns Hopkins University** has a great program for graduate students but seems to be lacking for undergraduate students. Graduate students in the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) have a program in South Asian Studies. The program offers a Masters in Arts in South Asia Studies. This program offers Hindi-Urdu and requires a certificate of proficiency in the language. Further, the program accepts Ph.D. students. However, Johns Hopkins should really expand their graduate program to an undergraduate level.

**Washington University in St. Louis** has a small but growing Indian Studies group. The university offers a minor in South Asian Language and Culture through the Department of Jewish, Islamic and Near Eastern Language and Cultures department. The University also offers Hindi as a language. This university is definitely unique in the sense that it has a minor but not a major, but may be one day the program will expand.

**Brown University** provides a concentration in South Asian Studies. The concentration requires 12 courses in South Asia and a language proficiency in either Hindi/Urdu or Sanskrit. The history of the department is unavailable, but it seems to be an established program. Rice University has the Chao Center for Asian Studies. The center offers a Bachelor of Arts and Masters in Arts in Asian Studies, but no specific department or major focusing on South Asia. The languages offered from South Asia consist only of Hindi.

**Vanderbilt University** has an Asian Studies Program. The program offers a major and minor in Asian Studies, but nothing is South Asian specific. No South Asian classes are offered either. The University of Notre Dame is very similar and has the Center for Asian Studies. The center offers a supplementary major in Asian Studies and a minor in Asian studies. Nothing is offered specifically for South Asian studies. No South Asian languages courses offered within the center. Both Vanderbilt University and the University of Notre Dame have a lot of room to grow in regards to their Asian Studies departments.

**Emory University** has a Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies department. The department combined South Asian Studies with Middle Eastern Studies in 2001. Within that department, undergraduates can undergo major courses in Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies with a track in South Asia. This is a Humanities degree from Emory. The department offers Hindi and Sanskrit. That concludes the review of the top 20 schools according to U.S News rankings. Other schools that have great South Asia Studies programs include the University of Texas and University of California, Berkeley. The University of Texas has an Asian Studies Undergraduate program with a specialisation in South Asia. The program also offers Hindi/Urdu, Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tamil. Furthermore, there is the South Asia Institute that offers support for the major. The University of California, Berkeley has a department called the South & Southeast Asian Studies department. It offers a major for undergraduates that can focus on South Asia. Berkeley boasts a large number of language courses such as Sanskrit, Hindi, Tamil, Urdu, Punjabi, Bangla and Telugu. Berkeley also offers graduate programs such as a Joint M.A./Ph.D. program and an M.A. program.

As you can see, most of the nation's top schools have at least Indian Studies classes, if not whole departments. Schools such as Harvard, University of Chicago, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania and the University of California, Berkeley have outstanding programs in South Asia Studies. Other universities have adequate programs or are greatly lacking in their South Asia Studies programs. Those schools that are lacking in a specific Indian Studies department should really consider the benefits of having a department. Schools such as Harvard and Princeton have seen the benefits of learning Sanskrit for over 100 years. Thus we can say that the linguistic intricacies of the culture and the literature that it unlocks are amazing and would be an interesting area to explore.

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No. J-25/7/2022- CPU  
Government of India

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The 30th August, 2022

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