



Nov 8

## Undergraduate Research: Interview with Amanda Martin, Recipient of the Rapoport-King Thesis Scholarship

by Emily Roehl

Today, we're pleased to share with you an interview with one of our undergraduates, **Amanda Martin**, who recently received the Rapoport-King Thesis Scholarship. Congratulations to Amanda on this incredible accomplishment!



### What was/is your favorite class in American Studies?

I took a Beats Literature class last semester with Dr. Meikle. I really loved that class. It was kind of refreshing to dive into the literature and live vicariously through these rugged souls. My life looks quite different. I really enjoyed that. I usually take the more intense cultural studies, critical thought classes, which I love, but it's nice to take something different every once in a while, so I really enjoyed that class.

### What are your research interests? Tell me a little about your thesis project.

My thesis is inspired and fueled by personal interests that I have in female identity in America and how it is constructed and maintained by women. I'm really interested in gender studies, obviously, and my thesis focuses specifically on examples of women who claim individual empowerment through partaking in beauty processes or traditional gender roles that can be perceived as regressive by feminist scholars. So I look at these complex, contradictory examples. For example, I'm looking at a pole dancing fitness studio called Brass Ovaries, which is interesting in itself. Even the title gives this idea of empowerment, and I'm hanging out with them and taking photos. Obviously, pole dancing has a lot of connotations for women in our society, but they see it as a really empowering thing, embracing their sexuality. They're not really frilly about it. I have pictures of them in their Converse, these kick-ass women. I like trying to understand this and grapple with these ideas I'm not really certain about. As I'm trying to understand it, photography is a really useful medium especially with something complex like this.

### What are your post-graduate plans?

I'm currently applying to a couple of graduate programs—probably not as many as I should, but I'm also open to the idea of taking a year off and doing photography and figuring life out if the grad school thing doesn't work out immediately. I'd love to continue studying American studies at a graduate level because in a lot of ways it fuels my photography, that curiosity. I'm always being introduced to new ideas about American culture that make me want to jump into it, take pictures, and get to know people. So I'd love to go to grad school.

### Why did you ultimately decide to study American Studies?

It's funny how it happened. I actually went into undergrad as a Public Relations major. I took a journalism elective because I was still interested in photography, and I had a journalism professor who totally tore apart the advertising industry and PR and was offering a critical analysis that I'd never been introduced to. It was the first time I thought, hey, you can look at things critically, and things aren't just a given, or naturally occurring, things are very constructed. So I ended up taking an AMS course on a whim as a history credit, and again I was introduced to this idea of critical cultural analysis, and I just loved it. So I immediately went in and added it as a second major, mainly because I thought it was awesome. I thought, I have my journalism degree, but I can do this for fun on the side. That's how it started, but I've really fallen in love with the field and I want to keep going with it.

*Amanda Martin is a senior studying American Studies and Photojournalism. She grew up in College Station, Texas. Amanda is currently employed by Texas Performing Arts as a student photographer and also pursues various other freelance photo opportunities. To view her work, visit [www.amandamartinphotography.com](http://www.amandamartinphotography.com).*

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