AMERICAN STUDIES

AMS 201 Introduction to American Studies (4 Credits)
This course provides an introduction to American Studies through the interdisciplinary study of American history, life and culture. Students develop critical tools for analyzing cultural texts (including literature, visual arts, music, fashion, advertising, social media, buildings, objects and bodies) in relation to political, social, economic and environmental contexts. The course examines the influence of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and transnationality on conceptions of citizenship, and struggles over what it means to be an “American,” and how this has shaped the distribution of power, resources and wellbeing in the United States. (H)(L)

Fall

AMS 202 Methods in American Studies (4 Credits)
This course introduces some of the exciting and innovative approaches to cultural analysis that have emerged over the last three decades. Students apply these methods to a variety of texts and practices (stories, movies, television shows, music, advertisements, clothes, buildings, laws, markets, bodies) in an effort to acquire the tools to become skillful readers of American culture, and to become more critical and aware as scholars and citizens. Prerequisite: AMS 201 is recommended but not required. (A)(H)

Spring

AMS 205 Introduction to Native American and Indigenous Studies (4 Credits)
This course is designed to introduce students to the interdisciplinary field of Native American and Indigenous Studies. This course looks at the diverse histories of Indigenous nations across North America, as well as histories of shared experiences with ongoing colonialism, legacies of resistance and connections to place. The class focuses on Indigenous perspectives, intellectual traditions and critical interventions across time through the work of historians, anthropologists, philosophers, literary scholars, Indigenous knowledge keepers, poets, writers and activists. This course is required for a Native American and Indigenous Studies focus for American Studies majors. (H)(L)

Fall, Spring, Alternate Years

AMS 215si Colloquium: Topics in Contemporary Native/Indigenous Studies-Global Indigenousities (4 Credits)
The displacement and disempowerment of Indigenous peoples by colonialism has created common histories of political, environmental and economic conflicts, as well as solidarity and leadership, across the globe. This course explores selected histories of colonialism (settler and extractive) around the globe and the impact on Indigenous groups from the Americas, the Arctic, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. The course also explores “indigeneity” as an analytical category, a political relationship, an economic position, a cultural site and a grounded, lived experience. The course attends to the intersection of indigeneity with sovereignty and nationhood, apocalypse and resilience, human rights and multi-species belonging. Enrollment limited to 25. (E) (H)(S)

Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 215ir Colloquium: Topics in Contemporary Native/Indigenous Studies-Indigenous Climate Resiliency (4 Credits)
It is often noted in mainstream news media that Indigenous peoples are “on the front lines” of the climate crisis, while providing little explanation as to why this is. Narratives of inherent Indigenous vulnerability obscure the ways in which Indigenous communities have mobilized to navigate environmental change, not only in the face of contemporary global warming, but historically, as settler colonial incursions radically transformed landscapes and constrained Indigenous knowledge practices that have provided tools for adaptation for thousands of years. This course considers how Indigenous climate vulnerability is largely a product of settler colonialism—not only a process and system, but also a particular way of understanding and relating to the nonhuman environment. Enrollment limited to 25. (E) (H)

Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 215sc Colloquium: Topics in Contemporary Native/Indigenous Studies-Indigenous Critiques of Settler Colonialism (4 Credits)
Long before settler colonialism was developed as a theoretical lens and settler colonial studies emerged as an academic field, Indigenous peoples in North America were approaching it through their own knowledge traditions and frameworks. This course centers the long history of Indigenous theoretical understandings of settler colonialism: through the work of “prophets” and visionaries like Handsome Lake (Seneca) and Tenskwatawa (Shawnee), “Red Progressives” like Zitkala-Sá (Lakota), post-WWII intellectuals like Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), and many more. The course also considers how critiques of settler colonialism have been embedded in Indigenous future imaginaries and have been an integral part of the emergence of Indigenous internationalism in the 20th century. Enrollment limited to 25. (E) (H)(S)

Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 227 Trade and Theft in Early America (4 Credits)
A seventeenth-century engraving imagines an encounter between two men wearing feathers and holding onto the same string of shells: depending on your perspective, this image looks like a scene of trade or one of theft at knife-point. In understanding moments from the past, representation and perspective shape not just interpretation, but sources themselves. Seeing moments as both trade and theft opens them to tellings and analyses from multiple perspectives, exposing overlooked elements and revealing the ways in which histories are made. This course introduces students to Early American history (c1500-1800) through the themes of trade, theft, representation and perspective. (H)(L)

Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 229 Native New England (4 Credits)
This course interrogates the space now known as New England by learning about it as a land with histories, peoples and life ways that predate and exceed the former English colonies and current United States. Students study the cultural distinctiveness of the Native peoples of New England, for example, the Mohawk, Mohogan, Abenaki, Wampanoag and Schaghticoke peoples, and the historical processes of encounter, adaptation, resistance and renewal that have characterized Native life in the area for centuries. This course explores the histories of the pre- and post-contact period through the perspectives of various Native communities, and discusses the legacies of these histories for Native New England today. (H)(L)(S)

Fall, Spring, Alternate Years
AMS 230cc Colloquium: Topics on the Asian American Experience-Chinese Diasporic Communities in the US and the World (4 Credits)
The course examines the histories of different Chinese diasporic communities in the world, including the United States as they relate to themes of race, empire, ethnicity, gender, globalization and nationalism. Enrollment limited to 20.
Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 230ih Colloquium: Topics on the Asian American Experience-US Imperialism and Hawai’i (4 Credits)
This course examines the history of U.S. occupation of Hawai’i as a case study of U.S. imperialism. The class examines the history of the rise and fall of the Hawaiian Kingdom, the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, the establishment of Hawai’i as a U.S. territory and the current status of Hawai’i as the 50th state in the United States. The class looks at the role of missionaries in introducing capitalist economy in Hawai’i, Native Hawaiian resistance to American annexation, indigenous land struggles as a result of urbanization and U.S. military expansion, Asian settlers in Hawai’i, revitalization of Hawaiian language and contemporary Native Hawaiian sovereignty movements for self-determination. Enrollment limited to 20. (E)(H)
Fall, Variable

AMS 234 Living on Turtle Island: an Introduction to Indigenous and Settler Studies (4 Credits)
This course focuses on Turtle Island, North America. The course prioritizes the Indigenous histories of the Northeast, while also considering histories of other peoples and places across the continent. The aim is to develop habits of thought beyond the reflexes and limitations of settler colonialism and to consider indigeneity in everyday lives. Interdisciplinary readings foreground indigeneity, race, feminist and decolonial analyses. This course is open to all students. Previous knowledge of Native American or Indigenous topics is welcome but not assumed. Enrollment limited to 40. (H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 235 American Popular Culture (4 Credits)
This course offers an analytical history of American popular culture since 1865. We start from the premise that popular culture, far from being merely a frivolous or debased alternative to high culture, is an important site of popular expression, social instruction and cultural conflict. We examine theoretical texts that help us to read popular culture, even as we study specific artifacts from a variety of pop culture sources, from television shows to Hollywood movies, the pornography industry to spectator sports, and popular music to theme parks. We pay special attention to questions of desire, and to the ways popular culture has mediated and produced pleasure, disgust, fear and satisfaction. Alternating lecture/discussion format. Enrollment limited to 25. (H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Alternate Years

AMS 238 Only Joking: Race, Gender, and Comedy in American Culture (4 Credits)
Comedy has been a primary site for enacting and contesting citizenship in the United States. This course presents a history of comedy from the nineteenth century to the present to analyze the role of humor in shaping racial and gender stereotypes, as well as expressions of solidarity, resistance and joy among marginalized groups. Case studies include blackface minstrelsy, stand up comedy, sitcoms, satirical news, social media posts and cancel culture debates. This course applies cultural studies, affect theory, media studies, feminist studies and critical race studies to analyze the social, political, psychological and emotional work of comedy. Enrollment limited to 40. (A)(H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 239 Colloquium: The Culture Wars (4 Credits)
This course places the “Culture Wars” – U.S. political battles waged over issues such as race, gender, sexuality, the family, abortion, education, guns, climate change and even the “non-partisan” COVID-19 pandemic – into the context of recent U.S. history. The goal of the course is to invite students to think critically about the workings of the Culture Wars within America’s democratic political system and about the impact of the Culture Wars on the broader sweep of life in the U.S. The course pays particular attention to the ways power relationships are manifested, and contested, through the Culture Wars. Enrollment limited to 20. (H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 240 Colloquium: Introduction to Disability Studies (4 Credits)
This course serves as an introductory exploration of the field of disability studies. How is disability defined? Who is disabled? And what resources are necessary to properly study disability? Together, students investigate: trends in disability activism, histories of medicine and science, conceptions of normal embodiment, the utility of terms like “crippled” or “disabled” and the representation of disability in culture. Enrollment limited to 20. (H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 245 Feminist & Indigenous Science (4 Credits)
This course considers such questions as: What does one know and how does one know it? What knowledges count as science? How is knowledge culturally situated? How has science been central to colonialism and capitalism, and what would it mean to decolonize science(s)? Is feminist science possible? The course looks at key sites and situations in media and popular culture; science writing; sociological accounts of science; creation stories; and traditional knowledges in which knowledge around the categories of race, gender, sex, sexuality, sovereignty and dis/ability are produced, contested and made meaningful. Enrollment limited to 35. (H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable
AMS 302 Seminar: The Material Culture of New England, 1630–1860 (4 Credits)
This course examines the material culture of everyday life in New England from the earliest colonial settlements to the Victorian era. It introduces students to the growing body of material culture studies and the ways in which historic landscapes, architecture, furniture, textiles, metalwork, ceramics, foodways and domestic environments are interpreted as cultural documents and as historical evidence. Offered on-site at Historic Deerfield (with transportation available from the Smith campus), the course offers students a unique opportunity to study the museum’s world-famous collections in a hands-on, interactive setting with curators and historians. Utilizing the disciplines of history, art and architectural history, anthropology, and archaeology, students explore the relationships between objects and ideas and the ways in which items of material culture both individually and collectively convey patterns of everyday life. Restrictions: Juniors and seniors only. Enrollment limited to 12. Instructor permission required. (A)(H)

Spring

AMS 340cc Seminar: Topics-Capstone in American Studies-Culture and Crisis (4 Credits)
According to a growing number of social theorists, and pretty much everybody else, this is an age of crisis. One of the critical tasks is to develop interdisciplinary tools to analyze how environmental conditions, economic systems, technological developments and political ideologies have sent humans on a path of catastrophes: climate change, resource exhaustion, inequality, social fragmentation and political repression. This course examines how these conditions have shaped American culture (asking why news broadcasts, the entertainment industry and social media respond to crises with distraction, disinformation, fear-mongering and scapegoating), and explore efforts of artists and activists to theorize and devise creative and just alternatives in visual arts, fiction, essays, comedy, movies and music. American Studies Majors only. Restrictions: Juniors and seniors only; Students are limited to one topic of AMS 340. Enrollment limited to 12. Instructor permission required. (H)(S)

Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 340nd Seminar: Topics-Capstone in American Studies-New Directions in American Studies (4 Credits)
This course engages new scholarship in American Studies, with a focus on critical disability studies, critical race studies, queer ecologies, and feminist science and technology studies. This course presents an occasion to rethink approaches to interdisciplinarity, intersectionality, ethnic studies and media and cultural studies. Likely texts include works by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Theri A. Pickens, Sami Schalk, Harlan Weaver, Cutcha Risling Baldy, Aurora Levins Morales, Ron Chew, La Marr Jurelle Bruce, Moya Bailey, Candace Fujikane, Sylvia Wynter, and M. Remi Yergeau. Restrictions: Juniors and seniors only; American Studies majors. Enrollment limited to 12. Juniors and seniors only. Instructor permission required. (H)(S)

Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 400 Special Studies (1–4 Credits)
Instructor permission required.

Fall, Spring

AMS 410 Tutorial on Research Methods at the Smithsonian (4 Credits)
Individual supervision by a Smithsonian staff member. Given in Washington, D.C. Restrictions: Open only to members of the Smithsonian Internship Program. Department permission required. (H)(S)

Fall

AMS 412 Research Project at the Smithsonian Institution (8 Credits)
Tutorial supervision by Smithsonian staff members. Given in Washington, D.C. Restrictions: Open only to members of the Smithsonian Internship Program. Department permission required. (H)(S)

Fall

AMS 431 Honors Project (8 Credits)
Department permission required.

Fall, Spring