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. We 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. We examine 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, Spring, Variable

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)

AMS 220dm Colloquium: Topics in American Studies-Dance, Music, Sex, Romance (4 Credits)
Since the 1950s rock ‘n’ roll and other forms of youth-oriented popular music in the U.S. have embodied rebellion. Yet the rebellion that rock and other popular music styles like rap have offered has often been more available to men than women. Similarly, the sexual liberation associated with popular music in the rock and rap eras has been far more open to “straight” desires over “queer.” This course examines how popular music from the 1950s to the present has been shaped by gender and sexuality, and the extent to which the music and its associated cultural practices have allowed artists and audiences to challenge gender and sexual norms, or alternately have served to reinforce those norms albeit with loud guitars and a heavy beat. Enrollment limited to 20. (A)(H)

AMS 229 Native New England (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. (E) (H)(L)

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. (E) (H)(L)

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)

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. The 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. (A)(H)(S)

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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. We will pay 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. It asks: how do we define disability? Who is disabled? And what resources do we need 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)
In this course, we will consider such questions as: What do we know and how do we 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? We will look at key sites and situations in media and popular culture, in science writing, in sociological accounts of science, in 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. (H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 267/ SWG 267 Colloquium: Queer Ecologies: Race, Queerness, Disability and Environmental Justice (4 Credits)
Offered as AMS 267 and SWG 267. What is learned by reading Queer Ecologies alongside Butler's Lilith's Brood, or Over the Hedge as environmental racism? The class considers what it means to have a racialized and sexualized identity shaped by relationships with environments. How is nature gendered, racialized and sexualized? Why? How are analytics of power mobilized around, or in opposition to, nature? How are conceptions of "disability" and "health" taken up in environmental justice movements? Students investigate the discursive and practical connections made between marginalized peoples and nature, and chart the knowledge gained by queering our conceptions of nature and the natural. Enrollment limited to 20. (E) (H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 302 Seminar: The Material Culture of New England, 1630–1860 (4 Credits)
This seminar 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, we 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. Enrollment limited to 12. Juniors and seniors only. Instructor permission required. (A)(H) Spring

AMS 340cc Seminar: Capstone in American Studies-Culture and Crisis (4 Credits)
According to a growing number of social theorists, and pretty much everybody else, we are living in an age of crisis. One of the critical tasks of our time is to develop interdisciplinary tools to analyze how environmental conditions, economic systems, technological developments, and political ideologies have sent us on a path of catastrophes: climate change, resource exhaustion, inequality, social fragmentation, and political repression. We examine 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. Enrollment limited to 12. Juniors and seniors only. Instructor permission required. (H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 340nd Seminar: Topics-Capstone in American Studies-New Directions in American Studies (4 Credits)
This seminar engages new scholarship in American Studies, with a focus on critical disability studies, critical race studies, queer ecologies, and feminist science & technology studies. This course presents an occasion to rethink approaches to interdisciplinarity, intersectionality, ethnic studies, and media & cultural studies. Likely texts include works by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Theri A. Pickens, Sami Schalk, Harlan Weaver, Cutchia Risling Baldy, Aurora Levins Morales, Ron Chew, La Marr Jurelle Bruce, Moya Bailey, Candace Fujikane, Sylvia Wynter, and M. Remi Yergeau. Limited to American Studies Majors. Enrollment limited to 12. Juniors and seniors only. Instructor permission required. (H)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable
AMS 351np/ENG 384np Seminar: Topics in Writing about American Society-Creative Nonfiction Writing through Photography (4 Credits)
Offered as AMS 351np and ENG 384np. A creative nonfiction writing workshop where students improve their writing using photography as muse, guide, foil and inspiration. Students write long, creative nonfiction pieces about current issues in American life using photography as a method for inspiring, analyzing and improving the prose. Students take photos, report and write, applying principles of photography such as point of view, depth of field, focus, flatness and timing to help with the essentials of narrative prose. Stories range from blog posts to profiles to fully realized long form, magazine-style, nonfiction articles. This is not a photography course, and if students’ photography improves as a result, that is a happy accident. No prior experience with photography required. Enrollment limited to 12. Juniors and seniors only. Writing sample and instructor permission required. (A)(L)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 355 Seminar: Tiny Homes in America: Salvaging the Material (4 Credits)
This seminar combines historical, theoretical, and material cultural sources about housing justice, and housing injustice, in the United States. A significant component of the course involves teaching students how to build a tiny house, while critically considering scholarly and popular cultural sources engaging the present, past, and (potential) future roles of small homes in America. In the class, we will pay particular attention to cultural-historical trends in home size and location as a way to better understand race, class, disability, settler colonialism, gender, age, sexuality, “the urban,” nature, sustainability, nation, and other analytics key to cutting-edge American Studies scholarship. Enrollment limited to 10. Juniors and seniors only. Instructor permission required. (E)
(A)(S)
Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 400 Special Studies (1-4 Credits)
Admission by permission of the instructor and the program director.
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. (H)(S)
Fall

AMS 412 Research Project at the Smithsonian Institution (8 Credits)
Tutorial supervision by Smithsonian staff members. Given in Washington, D.C. (H)(S)
Fall

AMS 430D Honors Project (4 Credits)
Fall, Spring, Annually

AMS 431 Honors Project (8 Credits)
Fall, Spring, Annually