

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}

Spring

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}

Fall

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 215ir 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. (E) {H}

Fall, Spring, Variable

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}

Fall, Spring, Variable

AMS 225 Colloquium: Corporate Capitalism, Media and Protest in America (4 Credits)

The U.S. Constitution recognizes a free press as the lifeblood of democracy with a mandate to inform citizens and hold the powerful accountable. But there is widespread distrust of the media in American society today. This course analyzes the transformation of the press into a corporate enterprise over the past 150 years, and the opposition this has provoked. Examining key developments (the creation of multinational media conglomerates as well as new digital media alternatives) and focusing on case studies such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and the 2016 Elections, we examine the influence of the media on American political, economic, and cultural life. {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)

In this course we interrogate 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. We devote our semester to studying the cultural distinctiveness of the Native peoples of New England, for example, the Mohawk, Mohegan, Abenaki, Wampanoag and Schaghticoke peoples and to understanding the historical processes of encounter, adaptation, resistance and renewal that have characterized Native life in the area for centuries. We explore histories of the pre- and post-contact period through the perspectives of various Native communities, and discuss 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. (E)

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. (E) (H)

Fall, Variable

AMS 234 Living on Turtle Island: an Introduction to Indigenous and Settler Studies (4 Credits)

In this course we will focus on situating ourselves on Turtle Island—North America. We will prioritize the Indigenous histories of our shared home, the Northeast, while also considering histories of other peoples and places across the continent. Our aim will be to develop habits of thought to help us move beyond the reflexes and limitations of settler colonialism and to consider indigeneity in our everyday lives. Interdisciplinary readings will 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. (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, sit-coms, 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)

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. 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 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. 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, 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. 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, Cutcha 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 431 Honors Project (8 Credits)

Fall, Spring