ABOUT THIS COURSE

From the course description: AME 204: Introduction to American Studies, 4.0 credits. A critical examination of the field of American Studies, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary methods. Required for the undergraduate Minor in American Studies.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

As the original inter-discipline in the United States, American Studies has long been a forum for serious reflection on America’s ever-evolving ideals and identities. American Studies in this way invites the kind of wide-ranging study that allows us to better know a nation that is itself always changing. American Studies is not just a subject matter, however. It is an especially flexible mode of interpretation. As such it asks us to move between such different fields as the arts and humanities, the social sciences, and the natural and applied sciences. Because of its broad reach, and because of its self-conscious methodologies, American Studies extends the bases of our collective understanding as it multiples the ways by which we make meaning from a decidedly complex text, “America.”

The aim of this course is twofold. On the one hand, AME 204 asks you to think long and hard about what “America” has meant historically, and what it continues to signify in this very global moment. On the other hand, AME 204 will train us to be polymath Americanists, expert “readers” of a culture so richly and ambiguously diverse that it requires us to learn to look at “America” through an assortment of disciplinary lenses.

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to …

- Think and act between academic disciplines, solving problems with a variety of intellectual tools
- Comprehend “America” in both its local and global contexts
- Thickly describe, analyze, and interpret the full diversity of American cultural formations, paying special attention to the vernacular (i.e., “common”) expressions of the same
- Interrogate the dynamic ties between “majority” and “minority” cultures and mores
- Test and measure Americans’ hemispheric and planetary impact
- Engage the problems and possibilities of the contemporary Americas
- Demonstrate sophisticated research skills, utilizing archival, print, interpersonal, and electronic resources
- Communicate with improved fluency in speech, in numbers, and in writing

* This course meets the General Education Outcomes for the following:
  
  (B1) Write Effectively
  (C3) Cultural Competencies

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Keywords for American Cultural Studies, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (NYU Press, 2014)
  ISBN: 9780814708019
Instructional Methods:

You, the student, are the focus of this introductory course in American Studies. As we survey and sample the field’s methods, we will also consider how these same methods apply to our own lives. To this extent AME 204 depends more on “connected learning” than conventional teaching, more on interactive conversations than formal lectures. I will provide abbreviated, topical content lectures to frame our discussions. And, particularly in the early weeks of the term, we will attend to a small selection of academic scholarship to familiarize ourselves with various interdisciplinary tools. Yet ultimately it is how these tools open up and animate our immediate world that concerns us most. Our assumption is that everyday life itself is an interdisciplinary problem. Together we will turn to American Studies for interdisciplinary answers to that problem, which admittedly has only provisional solutions.

Practically speaking, the course unfolds in three major units. These carry us from “Identity” to “Community” to “Culture.” Although we will approach each of these units separately as an occasion for reflection on “American” thoughts and things and theories and practices, we will also discover the ways in which these categories overlap.

* To make our time together as meaningful as possible, I ask that you set aside all electronic devices (phones, headphones, laptops, tablets, etc.) for the duration of our classroom meetings. Drinks are fine; food is not.

COURSE POLICIES, ASSIGNMENTS, ETC.

GRADING:

* Please note that you must successfully complete all assignments to pass the course.

    Attendance, Quizzes, and Participation 20%
    Essay #1 (Life Writing) 20%
    Essay #2 (Gender Studies) 20%
    Essay #3 (Literary Studies) 20%
    Midterm Exam 20%

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<td>87-89</td>
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ATTENDANCE: I take attendance daily, and we both need you to be here if our course is to succeed. Your absences in any case directly affect your participation grade (see below). More than two absences will cause you to receive an “F” for participation. To exceed three absences (for whatever reason) will mean that you fail the course. Note that it is your responsibility to keep track of your absences and to find out what you have missed when absent. Note, too, that you cannot make up any in-class assignments that you might miss.

PARTICIPATION: a full 20% of your final grade derives from your daily contributions to class. This means:

1. You must come to class, and you must arrive and leave on time.
2. You will bring a copy of each day’s assigned reading. Otherwise, you will be counted absent.

3. You must demonstrate a positive level of commitment to the course. I expect you to make a meaningful contribution to each and every class meeting, both in person and online.

4. Do not just talk; also listen, especially to your classmates. Demonstrating a proper regard for others will ensure that we achieve true dialogue.

For my part, I need to set our agenda and keep class meetings lively, interesting, and edifying. But I can only fulfill my responsibilities if you fulfill yours. Let this be our classroom contract.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: All written work that you submit must be your own. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, visit the following Web site: http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/hc/plagiarism.html.

DISABILITY NOTICE: If you have a documented disability, please contact me early in the semester so that we may arrange reasonable accommodations to support your success in this course. Also be sure to take advantage of the resources available at Disability Services for Students, Office of Student Life, 330 Memorial Union, (401) 874-2098.

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COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: This schedule is tentative. If we need more time to complete a task or pursue a point of interest, we will do so, within reason. You are responsible for all class meetings and assignments as well as any announced changes.

* Indicates electronic reading

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UNIT I: Identity

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6-24: “Reading” the Cultural Landscape
READING: Peirce F. Lewis, “Axioms for Reading the Landscape” (1979)*
READING: Keywords, “America” + “Culture”

6-26: Cultural Mapping
READING: Cabeza de Vaca, La Relación (1542); e-text @ http://alkek.library.txstate.edu/swwc/cdv/ – Chs. 1-12*
Group Presentations

7-1: Identities Denied
READING: Claudia Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric (2014), Books I – VII
Essay #1 (Life Writing) Assigned

7-3: Scaled Identities
READING: Keywords, “Race” + “Black” + “Citizenship” + “Identity”*
Essay #1 (Life Writing) Due

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UNIT II: Community

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7-8: Domestic Drama
READING: Alison Bechdel, Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic (2006), 1-231
Essay #2 (Gender Studies) Assigned

7-10: Engendering American Studies
READING: Keywords, “Family”* + “Domestic” + “Normal”

Essay #2 (Gender Studies) Due

7-15: Neighborhood Watch
FILM: Spike Lee, Do the Right Thing (1989; 125 mins.)
READING: Catherine Pouzoulet, “The Cinema of Spike Lee: Images of a Mosaic City” (1997)*

7-17: Midterm Exam

UNIT III: Culture

7-22: The Problem of Postmodernism
Essay #3 (Literary Studies) Assigned

7-24: Keywords for American Cultural Studies
READING: A Keyword of Your Choosing, presented and explained
Essay #3 (Literary Studies) Due