

AMERICAN STUDIES (AMSD)

AMSD 106 Writing New Jersey Now (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): WRIT 105 or HONP 100. This course explores the diverse and dynamic cultural landscape of New Jersey in the 21st century. Through reading and writing in various genres, students will examine how contemporary writers represent the state's history, culture, politics, and identity. Students will also develop their own creative voices and perspectives on New Jersey, producing original essays, both written and multimodal.

AMSD 220 Foundations of American Identities and Cultures (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): WRIT 105 or HONP 100. This course introduces students to the interdisciplinary field of American Studies. Students will engage with primary and secondary sources of all kinds dealing with history, literature, culture, and other fields. The course highlights primary questions in American Studies, and draws from multiple texts, genres, and themes. It explores the many ways the United States has been historically defined and interpreted, and the ways that various narratives, symbols, and cultural products have contributed to both dominant and dissident understandings. The course will progress through a set of problems or questions about particular historical moments, with the goal of exposing students to intellectual and creative possibilities in the field of American Studies, as well as providing incoming majors with key concepts and analytical tools that can be used in more advanced courses.

AMSD 221 Reconstructing American Liberty (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): WRIT 105 or HONP 100 or PHIL 100 or PHIL 106. What is American liberty? While everyone agrees that liberty is a core American value, debate about the meaning of liberty abounds. One individual or group can be accused of being an 'enemy of liberty' by some while being heralded as a 'friend of liberty' by others. Then, there is the glaring, violent contradiction at America's origin: the liberty of some was made possible only in virtue of the subjection—enslavement or eradication—of others. Our love of liberty binds us together and, at the same time, tears us apart. For these reasons, it is reasonable to ask, not only what is liberty, but also is it even worth defending? The proposed course will take up these questions and reflect on the complexities and contradictions surrounding our conception of liberty by examining various, often competing definitions of liberty. Through this examination, students will acquire a deeper understanding of different ideas of American liberty, and the cultural-historical contexts from which they emerged. Short, impactful readings in the history of American political thought—from the early modern era until the present day—from a wide variety of voices will be connected to contemporary issues such as sexual and reproductive freedom, marriage, guns, public health, environmental protection, gender, privacy and property and artificial intelligence. Mutually Exclusive with PHIL 221.

AMSD 225 Afrofuturism and Its Histories (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): ENGL 110, ENGL 111, ENGL 114, WRIT 106 or HONP 101. The term afrofuturism has its origins in African-American science fiction and today is generally used to refer to a cultural movement that uses the frame of speculative fiction to reimagine the history of the African diaspora and to invoke a vision of a technically advanced and hopeful future. Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic, a literary and filmic category, a set of political ideas, and even, for some, a philosophy of history and time. This course is about the significance of non-realist genres and aesthetics to our thinking and writing about race, asking what kinds of cultural and political work imaginative and experimental literary and other creative forms can do, especially in relation to or in contrast with realist forms and political activism.

AMSD 227 Disney and American Utopia (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): WRIT 105 or HONP 100. A critical look at the cultural significance of Disney products, ranging from early Mickey Mouse films to the Disneyland and Disneyworld theme parks to contemporary feature films. Will include attention to Disney's century-long role in constructing narratives of American history, identity, and nationhood and the heavily ideological nature of those narratives. Special attention will be given to the theme parks as constructed environments offering utopian visions of the American past and American future. The approach will be interdisciplinary, and the course will be open to those coming to Disney as fans, creators, critics, or aspiring entrepreneurs.

AMSD 230 American Popular Entertainment: Vaudeville, Radio, Film and TV (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): AMSD 220, WRIT 106, HONP 101, ENGL 110, ENGL 111, ENGL 113, or ENGL 114. This course introduces students to the history of American popular entertainment during the first half of the 20th Century. It focuses on the variety format developed by Vaudeville and its later incarnations in early sound film comedy, radio comedy and the pioneering days of television. Each of these entertainment forms addressed and helped define American modernity: urbanization, immigrant identities, wit, the pursuit of pleasure and consumption, challenges to 19th Century sexual mores. The course will teach students about the specific language and conventions of these cultural forms, mostly as they informed comedy. These include direct address to the audience, fragmented or episodic narrative structure, reflexivity, unique performance styles and an intimate rapport between performer and audience.

AMSD 231 Race, Ethnicity, and American Popular Music (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): WRIT 105 or HONP 100. This course examines the historical significance of popular music in the United States in the 20th and 21st centuries. Students will learn to analyze musical sound as "text." More crucially, the focus will be on the cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions of genres including gospel, blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, rock, country, salsa, punk, hip hop, and techno. While the course will discuss the stylistic evolution of American popular music, the focus will be on reading, or listening to, music as a historical text as a key to understand major themes of American history.

AMSD 235 Caribbean Diasporas (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): WRIT 106, HONP101, ENGL 110, ENGL 111, or ENG 114.

This course examines what it means to be Caribbean, or of Caribbean descent, in the diaspora and how Caribbean culture has been defined in historical and contemporary contexts through a survey of Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic literature. In this course students will learn how legacies of colonialism and modernity affect Caribbean populations and how they negotiate empire, identity, language, culture, and notions of home. The course offers an interdisciplinary understanding of Caribbean culture, society, and identity in a transnational context that explores popular culture, memory, literature, and media to understand Caribbean diasporic cultural formations. Students will learn how to distinguish between migration and diaspora while recognizing how Caribbean diasporic literature can be a meditation on home, culture, belonging, community, identity, and displacement. Students will read and compare texts in various genres—such as poetry, memoirs, essays, and novels.

AMSD 250 Special Topics in American Identities and Cultures (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): WRIT 105 or HONP 100. Study of a specific area, issue, movement, or topic not included in the regular program offerings. May be repeated without limit as long as the topic is different.

AMSD 330 American Identities and Cultures: Theories and Methods (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): AMSD 220. This course will familiarize students with core theoretical and methodological approaches to American Studies, including case studies of important debates in the field. It will look at the interdisciplinary basis of American Studies and how it engages with other fields. Students will learn different ways of understanding and analyzing culture in many forms including high art, folk and popular culture, subcultures, countercultures, and material culture; they will consider the role of culture in shaping individual, group, regional, and American national identities, with attention to historically powerful categories of such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class and also to transnational contexts. Students will become practitioners by learning how to formulate research questions, identify sources, and select suitable methods of inquiry, including work with archival sources, electronic databases and digitized collections, and published materials.

AMSD 340 Representing the American West (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): Any 200-level or higher AMSD or ENGL course. This course will consider the American West as an idea, place, and process. We will focus primarily on the period from the 1850s through the 1930s and study texts such as exploration and settlement narratives, autobiography, fiction, and historiography, as well as music, painting, photography, and film. We will examine the iconography of the wilderness; westward migration and pioneer images; the "closing" of the frontier; issues of race, ethnicity, class, and gender in relation to nationalism and nativism; the myth of the "Vanishing American"; and the legacy of conquest, settler colonialism, and the attempted genocide of indigenous peoples. Works will be analyzed from sociohistorical and cultural perspectives, with an emphasis on class, gender, and racial identity. A crucial question to explore will be how a site of conflict and violence has often been seen as a land of adventure and opportunity.

AMSD 350 Healing in America: History, Narrative, and Performance (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): PHIL 204 or MEDH 204 or any 200-level ENGL course or any 200-level AMSD course. This interdisciplinary course examines the racial, religious, class-based, and gendered dynamics that impact healing beyond doctor-patient relationships in the U.S., broadly defined as "American" to accommodate cross-border identities. Performances related to health help us understand the relationship between communal identity and healing, legacies of discrimination, and the policies and prejudices that affect private health matters in pan-American history and culture. Students analyze scientific studies and the performative aspects of healing in medical narratives, memoirs, fiction, drama, film, and other visual media. Students will leave the course with a greater understanding about the ways in which collective care, communal engagement, and access shape the history, narrative, and performance of healing in America.

AMSD 380 Shakespeare and American Identity (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): Any 200-level or higher AMSD or ENGL course.

Shakespeare has occupied a singular role in struggles over what it means to be American. From the colonial period to the present, no other body of literature has been as consistently popular across classes, or as powerful a marker of "high" culture, or as thoroughly cut, reconstructed, adapted, revised, and satirized to as many different ends. This course examines the roles that Shakespearean performance has played in renegotiating the limits of American identity from the colonial period to the present day. The central questions of the course concern the unusual power of Shakespeare, as a cultural marker and a set of malleable performance practices, to complicate the issue of inclusion in and exclusion from the American democratic experiment. We will consider how Shakespeare's bottomless adaptability and popular origins have enabled claims for the inclusion of marginal communities even as his canonical, "civilizing" weight has been used to further oppression and colonial expansion.

AMSD 440 Capstone in American Identities and Cultures (3 credits)

Prerequisite(s): AMSD 330. Students will complete an externship at a local site where their knowledge of American identities and cultures will be professionally valuable—for example, a museum, historical site, performing arts group, library, or nonprofit organization among other opportunities. Students will work independently under the supervision of a faculty member.