AMERICAN STUDIES (AMSD)

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 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 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 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 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 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.