American studies is an interdisciplinary major that enables students to explore the complex interactions of histories, cultures, identities, and representations that have shaped the experiences of those living in the United States. A three-course sequence provides majors with a shared, increasingly rigorous engagement with the theories, methods, and skills central to the field. Within this framework students craft an individualized course of study drawing on the program’s strengths in visual culture, popular culture, gender and sexuality studies, American ethnic studies, transnationalism, and cultural geography.

American studies majors learn a multiplicity of approaches that enable them to draw on and move between traditional academic disciplines. This interdisciplinary methodology informs all aspects of students’ critical thinking about American cultures as they engage in analytical writing, thoughtful discussion, formal oral presentations, and independent research. The program aims to train students to be deeply and critically involved in the texts, forms, and practices that constitute the world around them and to enable them to participate meaningfully in the political, cultural, and intellectual worlds they inhabit.

Requirements for the Major in American Studies

The American studies major requires 11 courses—four in American studies (American Studies 171, 393, 493, and one elective); two in American history (one pre-1865 and one post-1865); three in American literature and visual culture (one pre-1865, one post-1865), and any other American literature course, or a literature in translation course, or a course in visual culture; and two electives above the 200 level, selected from a list of appropriate courses or approved by the American studies advisor. In fulfilling the electives, students are encouraged to take courses with a transnational focus and/or with elements of experiential learning.

Of the required courses, American Studies 171 and the two history courses are normally taken before the end of the second year.

The point scale for retention of the major applies to all courses offered toward the major. No requirement for the major may be taken satisfactory/unsatisfactory. No more than five courses taken abroad may be counted toward the major.

Attention is called to the major in African-American studies; requirements are listed under “African-American Studies.”

Senior Projects

All senior majors will take American Studies 493, which requires them to research, write, and present a significant original project. The presentations are typically made as part of the annual Colby Liberal Arts Symposium.

Honors Program

Students majoring in American studies may apply during their junior year for admission to the honors program. Permission is required; students must have a 3.5 GPA in the major to be eligible to apply. Successful completion of the work of the honors thesis, and of the major requirements, will enable the student to graduate with “Honors in American Studies.”

Courses from Other Departments That May Be Applied to the American Studies Major

Students who can provide a compelling rationale may petition the American Studies Program to apply courses not listed here. (Not all courses are offered every year; check curriculum for availability.)

Anthropology

- 236 Illegal Drugs, Law, and the State
- 244 Anthropology of Religion
- 246 Religion and Everyday Life in Muslim Societies
- 253 Goods, Gifts, and Globalizing Consumers
- 256 Land, Food, Culture, and Power
- 259 Reading Ethnography
- 313 Researching Cultural Diversity
- 341 Culture, Mobility, Identity: Encounters in the African Diaspora
- 373 The Anthropology of Gender and Sexuality
- 374 Public Anthropology
• 421 Anthropology of Creativity

Art
• 231 Latin American Art and Architecture, 1492-1820
• 279 20th-Century Art
• 372 Economy of Art
• 423 Modern Exhibition Culture
• 493 Seminar (when appropriate)

Cinema Studies
• 215 The Image of Women and Men in American Film
• 243 Narrative Film Production
• 248 Digital Publishing: Telling Stories Online
• 251 History of International Cinema I
• 321 Topics in Film Theory (when appropriate)

Education
• 201 Education and Social Justice
• 213 Schools and Society
• 215 Children and Adolescents in Schools and Society
• 322 Social Class and Schooling
• 324 Elite Schooling in Global Context

English
• 255 Studies in American Literary History: Pre-1860
• 256 Studies in American Literary History: Civil War to the Present
• 264 Comparative Studies: Emily Dickinson and English Poetry
• 333 Environmental Revolutions in American Literature and Culture
• 336 Early American Women Writers
• 341 American Realism and Naturalism: Then and Now
• 343 African-American Literature: Speaking in Tongues
• 345 Modern American Fiction
• 346 Culture and Literature of the American South
• 347 Modern American Poetry
• 351 Contemporary American Poetry
• 353 The American Short Story
• 354 Slavery and the American Literary Imagination
• 369 Reading Race Now: 21st-Century Multiethnic-American Literature
• 413 Authors Courses (when appropriate)
• 422 Queer Theory and U.S. Literatures and Cultures
• 435 Narratives of Contact and Captivity
• 457 American Gothic Literature
• 493 Seminar in American Literature

Environmental Studies
• 214 Introduction to GIS and Spatial Analysis

Global Studies
• 255 Global Health: Critical Perspectives on Health, Care, and Policy
• 455 Intervention: The Ethics and Politics of Humanitarianism

Government
• 210 Interest-Group Politics
• 211 The American Presidency
• 214 Parties and the Electoral Process
• 273 American Political Thought
• 313 National Powers in American Constitutional Law
• 314 Civil Liberties in American Constitutional Law
• 316 Presidential Electoral Politics
• 318 Money and Politics
• 320 The Rights Revolution and Its Discontents
• 413 Seminar: Policy Advocacy
• 414 Seminar: Ethics in Politics
• 432 Seminar: U.S. Foreign Policy

History
• 131 Survey of U.S. History, to 1865
• 132 Survey of U.S. History, 1865 to the Present
• 231 American Women’s History, to 1870
• 232 American Women’s History, 1870 to the Present
• 233 Native Americans to 1850
• 234 Native Americans since 1850
• 239 The Era of the Civil War
• 242 Colonial North America
• 245 Science, Race, and Gender
• 246 Luddite Rantings: A Historical Critique of Big Technology
• 247 African-American History, from Slavery to Freedom
• 283 Golden Diaspora: Modern American Jewish History
• 334 The Great Depression: America in the 1930s
• 336 After Appomattox
• 337 The Age of the American Revolution
• 338 History in Reverse: Backwards through the Records from Now to Then
• 342 Crisis and Reform: American Society and Politics in the 1960s
• 432 Research Seminar: Native Americans in New England
• 447 Research Seminar: The Cold War

Music
• 222 Maine’s Musical Soundscapes: Ethnography of Maine
• 262 Music in Life, Music as Culture: Introduction to Ethnomusicology

Philosophy
• 213 Philosophical Inquiries into Race
• 217 Feminism and Science
• 243 Environmental Ethics
• 352 American Philosophy

Psychology
• 253 Social Psychology

Religious Studies
• 217 Religion in the United States
• 221 The Jews of Maine
• 256 The African-American Religious Experience
• 257 Women in American Religion
• 319 Bollywood and Beyond: South Asian Religions through Film
• 357 Jesus Christ Superstar: The Bible in Film

Science, Technology, and Society
• 485 Technology Matters

Sociology
• 231 Contemporary Social Problems
• 243 College in Crisis?
• 252 Race, Ethnicity, and Society
• 259 Activism and Social Movements
• 273 Sociology of Families
• 274 Social Inequality and Power
• 276 Sociology of Gender
• 355 African-American Women and Social Change
• 357 Civil Rights, Black Power, and Social Change
• 358 The Sociology of W.E.B. Du Bois
• 364 Policing the American City
• 493 Senior Seminar in Sociology (when appropriate)
AM117j  Fundamentals of Screenwriting  An introduction to the craft of writing film scripts, with a strong emphasis on screenplay format and the three-act structure. Besides studying films and screenplays, students will complete exercises in character development, scene construction, dialogue, and description. The final project will be a complete script for a short (no longer than 30 pages) three-act feature film.  Two credit hours.  WILSON

[AM120]  Living the Good Life, 1965-2015  What constitutes the good life? How does one live ethically in a complex, often unjust world? We explore how a diverse group of Americans theorized alternatives to conventional values and ways of living, from Afro-Futurism to Buddhist economics, then investigate people who came "back to the land" in Maine to put their theories about how to live into practice. Critical reading and discussion, archival and oral history research, and analytical writing will be emphasized. Students will use new digital humanities tools to present their research online in innovative ways.  Four credit hours.  H, W1.

[AM120B]  Writing about Place  The places we live in reflect and shape who we are. We will explore ways of thinking and writing about place, using the American home as a focal point. We will examine changes in the home as a material structure and imaginative construct, paying particular attention to how place intersects with conceptions of gender, class, race, and sexuality. Students will analyze various forms of culture, historical and contemporary, while practicing writing in a variety of formats.  Four credit hours.  W1.

[AM135A]  New York City: Global Crossroads  An interdisciplinary exploration of New York as a center of 20th-century American economic, cultural, and political power, focused on the city as the site both of extensive immigration from abroad and of internal migration within the United States. Key topics include the city's leadership in global economic exchange and capitalist development; its centrality to American visual arts, music, literature, film, and theater; and the role of a diverse range of immigrants and migrants in shaping local, national, and global economies and cultures. Interdisciplinary critical thinking, textual analysis, critical writing, and active discussion are emphasized. Part of the three-course Integrated Studies 135, "New York: Global City."  Prerequisite: Concurrent enrollment in American Studies 135B and English 135. Elect IS135.  Four credit hours.  H.

AM135Bf  Space, Place, and New York City  Examines New York City using the twin concepts of place and space. Pivots on the escalating significance of place in a world of modernization and globalization. Explores New York as an economic and cultural control center and considers how New York capitalists produce space near and far. Investigates expressions and consequences (positive and negative) of global capitalism on city streets, and examines how place and the built environment construct cultural and political identity. Discussion-based. Students develop skills of spatial, material, textual, and historical analysis and critical writing.  Four credit hours.  S, W1.

[AM136A]  Sex and Family in Postwar America  In the decades following the end of World War II, popular representations of romantic love and the American family often promoted ideals of capitalist democracy. We will explore ways in which portrayals of gender and sexualities conformed to, negotiated, or resisted narratives of national identity. Primary texts include paintings, television shows, films, magazines, music, and advertisements. Students will develop skills in visual, textual, and aural analysis, interdisciplinary critical thinking, and dynamic discussion. Part of the three-course Integrated Studies 136 cluster, "America in the Postwar World: 1945-1970."  Prerequisite: Concurrent enrollment in American Studies 136B and History 136.  Four credit hours.  A.

[AM136B]  Material Landscape of Postwar United States  We will examine the postwar United States through "things," considering how materiality culturally constructed class, gender, race, and sexuality. We will explore the meanings of objects at all scales; differences and continuities between "high" and "low" design; gendering and racializing of public and private spaces; automobile aesthetics and spatiality; consumption-based progress narratives; and restricted access to postwar abundance. In this discussion-based course, students will develop their skills of material, spatial, visual, and historical analysis and their critical writing skills. Part of the three-course Integrated Studies 136
AM171fs Introduction to American Studies  An introduction to methods and themes in American studies, the interdisciplinary examination of past and present United States culture. A wide selection of cultural texts from all periods of American history explore the dynamic and contested nature of American identity. Literary, religious, and philosophical texts, historical documents, material objects, works of art and music, and varied forms of popular culture are studied, with a focus on what it means, and has meant, to be an American.

Prerequisite: First-year or sophomore standing.

Four credit hours.  W1.


Three credit hours.  S, U.

AM217s Religion in the United States  Listed as Religious Studies 217.

Four credit hours.  H.  CAMPBELL

AM221s Mapping Waterville  This interdisciplinary humanities lab combines geographical and architectural fieldwork, archival research, and digital publishing. Waterville is our learning space. Students construct an online archive of Waterville's built environment using architectural sketches, photographs, interviews, and archival research. We then analyze and interpret the town's material and spatial character, track and explain changes across time, and publish our interpretations online using innovative digital mapping technologies.

Four credit hours.  H.  LISLE


Four credit hours.  A.

AM226f Cultural Geography of Allen Island  Places that people design, build, and live in structure their experience and behavior, shaping their ideas about themselves and the world. Students explore how beliefs about Maine, nature, and the past are expressed through Allen Island's cultural geography. We locate the design and use of the island's built environment in the context of mid-coast Maine and explore how human beings have responded to and represented the island across time. This interdisciplinary course combines geographical fieldwork, cultural analysis, and archival research, culminating in a collaborative and public digital humanities project.

Four credit hours.  H.  LISLE

[AM228] Nature and the Built Environment  Built environments order human experience and action, shaping people's sense of themselves and the world. We examine how the built environment has influenced and expressed Americans' relationships with nature. We track how ideas about the natural environment emerge in different historical and geographical settings and consider the material and environmental consequences of these beliefs. Topics include park design, suburban development, environmental justice campaigns, and green building. In this reading-intensive discussion course, students develop abilities to interpret material, spatial, visual, and historical evidence.

Four credit hours.  H.

AM232s Queer Identities and Politics  Listed as Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies 232.

Four credit hours.  U.

ARELLANO

AM234s From Rockabilly Kings to Lady Gaga: A History of Rock 'n' Roll  Listed as Music 234.

Four credit hours.  A.

ZELENSKY

[AM236] Introduction to the Francophone World: The Americas  Listed as French 236.

Four credit hours.  I.

[AM241] Cultural Work of American Football  Examines the place of football in American culture. Identifies the game's core ideologies through investigations of its origins, development, and major historical crises, paying particular attention to how football constructs gender, race, and nationalism. Students emerge from this discussion-based course with enhanced skills in analyzing material, visual, and literary cultural expression and improved abilities to speak and write cogently and clearly about complex and contested ideas.

Four credit hours.

[AM243] Introduction to Television Studies: The L Word  An introduction to recent critical approaches to the study of television in the United States, with an emphasis on feminist methodologies and questions. The economic, technological, historical, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of this enormously influential medium will be explored. After completing extensive research on relevant social and cultural contexts, students will apply one or more methodological approaches to produce their own critical readings of the Showtime series The L Word (2004-09), the first program to represent a lesbian community in depth. Extensive out-of-class viewing required.

Three credit hours.


Four credit hours.  H, U.

[AM258] American Art 1650-1900  Listed as Art 258.  Four credit hours.  A.

[AM259] American Art since 1900  Listed as Art 259.  Four credit hours.  A.

[AM275] Gender and Popular Culture  In the 21st century, popular culture is a key site for the dissemination of ideas about gender roles, gender relations, and sexuality. Relying on examples from the end of World War II to the present, students will analyze the use of films, music, advertising, toys, television, magazines, and popular fiction to help construct us as gendered individuals and to sustain systematic gender inequality. Students will write weekly informal papers and longer analytical papers and will be expected to participate actively in class discussions to develop their analytical capacities and hone oral communication skills.  Four credit hours.  U.

AM276s African-American Culture in the United States  An interdisciplinary examination of black cultural expression—including folktales, the blues, gospel music, work songs, jazz, sermons, dance, literature, and social institutions—from the slave era to the present, tracing the stages of development of a distinctive black culture in America, its relationship to the historical, social, and political realities of African Americans, and its role in the cultural formation of the United States. Also listed as African-American Studies 276.  Four credit hours.  S, U.  GILKES

AM285s History of Photography  Listed as Art 285.  Four credit hours.  A.  SALTZ

[AM313A] One Nation Under a Groove: Culture and Politics of the 1970s  An interdisciplinary examination of the intersections between the challenging political, economic, and diplomatic events of the 1970s and the vibrant social movements that evolved from the transformations of the 1960s. Focus on how popular culture (music, film, television, fiction, and nonfiction) shaped Americans’ understandings of and responses to Vietnam, Watergate, de-industrialization, and various energy crises, and to the development of civil rights, women’s, gay, environmental, and conservative movements. Critical reading and discussion, textual interpretation, and analytical writing will be emphasized.  Four credit hours.

[AM313B] Designing the American Seventies  Explores how design expressed and shaped American lives from 1968 to 1980. We assess design at many scales, from regional development to everyday consumer products (in all their polyester and shag-carpeted glory), analyzing objects and their representations in advertising, film, and music. We attend to how design was influenced by economic and energy crises, an emergent ecological consciousness, challenges to gender and sexual norms, and a fascination with "roots" and heritage. In this reading-intensive discussion course, students develop abilities to analyze and interpret material, spatial, visual, and historical evidence. Part of the two-course Integrated Studies cluster, "America in the 1970s."  Prerequisite: Concurrent enrollment in American Studies AM313A.  Four credit hours.  S.

[AM322J] Imagining Maine  This interdisciplinary humanities lab examines Maine’s transformation in the American imagination from a barren wilderness to a “vacationland.” We will collect and analyze representations of Maine in painting, photography, literature, maps, advertising, travel guides, diaries, and historical documents. For our final project, we will work collaboratively to build a website that showcases this material. Research may include travel to exhibitions and archives around the state.  Three credit hours.

[AM331] The Stadium and the City  Stadiums are among our most important social spaces: central to how millions understand and experience the public world and crucial to shaping community identity in inclusive and exclusive ways. We will examine relationships between stadiums, cities, and people in the United States and across the world. We explore how stadiums have been constructed, controlled, and used; how they express sets of values and structures of power; and how users of these stadiums experience them as groups and individuals. Students learn different approaches to interpreting space, write an original research paper, and present their research at the Colby Liberal Arts Symposium.  Four credit hours.  H.

[AM334] Film and Society: Films of the 1940s  Immersion into the Hollywood films of the 1940s. Using the basic tenets of genre theory—that film genres mediate the general anxieties of a culture—study of a range of genres, including Westerns, film noir, melodrama, and social problem films, as well as the social conditions with which these genres are in dialogue. Of special interest are the ways that World War II and the Cold War affected ideals of masculinity and femininity and a national dialogue about race. Students will (1) learn the basic language for describing film form; (2) read a number of theoretical texts; (3) develop skills of visual analysis; and (4) develop skills in writing clear, persuasive arguments about the films and their contexts.  Prerequisite: American Studies 171, Art 101, Cinema Studies 142, English 241, or Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies 201.  Four credit hours.  U.

[AM342] Political Violence: American Cultures of Radicalism  Focuses on the complex history of “revolutionary” American political behavior with emphasis on practices and representations of political violence. Draws together case studies of 20th-century radical and
militant political movements and actors to engage the following questions: What is political violence? How and why do different periods and political visions produce different forms of political violence? How have these activists and organizations been represented within the broader context of U.S. political cultures and mythologies about American democracy? Examples include union violence, armed feminist resistant, black militancy, and radical land reclamation movements. Prerequisite: American Studies 171. Four credit hours. U.

AM344f  Black Radical Imaginations  Listed as Anthropology 344. Four credit hours. BHIMULL

AM355f  African-American Women and Social Change  Listed as Sociology 355. Four credit hours. U. GILKES

AM357s  Civil Rights, Black Power, and Social Change  Listed as Sociology 357. Four credit hours. S, U. GILKES

AM358s  Photography and Migration  Listed as Art 358. Four credit hours. U. SHEEHAN

[AM364] Spike Lee's United States  An in-depth, interdisciplinary exploration of recent American culture through the lens of the African-American filmmaker Spike Lee. Working in multiple genres, Lee has offered compelling and controversial interpretations of the significance of race in shaping all aspects of American life. Students will situate a range of Lee's films in their historical and cultural contexts and will use the tools of film analysis to understand his aesthetic and representational innovations. Critical reading and thinking, intensive discussion, and analytical writing will be emphasized. Each student will research and write a major paper analyzing one of Lee's films and will present that work to the class. Prerequisite: American Studies 171 or 276 or Cinema Studies 142. Four credit hours.

AM375s  Representing Difference in American Visual Culture  Examines constructions and contestations of racial identity in U.S. visual cultures of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Draws on scholarship on scientific racism, intersectionality, trauma and racial time, and memory and memorials. Visual media include photographs, films, sculptures and monuments, and illustrated books. Emphasizes skills of visual analysis, written argument, and independent research. Prerequisite: American Studies 171 or Art 101, and sophomore or higher standing. Four credit hours. U. SALTZ

AM393f  Junior Seminar: Theories of Culture  Introduces students to major currents in cultural theory, including Marxist, structuralist, poststructuralist, and critical race and gender theory. Emphasizes their application to contemporary cultural objects and events. Analytical and interpretive skills will be demonstrated in frequent writing assignments and a final independent research project. Prerequisite: Junior or senior standing as an American studies major or a women's, gender, and sexuality studies major or minor. Four credit hours. U. SALTZ


[AM457]  American Gothic Literature  Listed as English 457. Four credit hours. L, U.

[AM458]  American Art in a Global Context  Listed as Art 458. Four credit hours.

AM483fj  Senior Honors Project  Research conducted under the guidance of a faculty member and focused on an approved interdisciplinary topic leading to the writing of a thesis. Prerequisite: A 3.5 major average and permission of the program director. Three or four credit hours. FACULTY

AM491f, 492s  Independent Study  Individual study of special problems in American studies in areas where the student has demonstrated the interest and competence necessary for independent work. Prerequisite: Permission of the instructor and the program director. One to four credit hours. FACULTY

[AM493B]  Senior Seminar: Neoliberal America  We will construct a Foucaultian “history of the present,” tracing the economic, political, social, and artistic developments of the last 30 years on contemporary U.S. culture. Topics include competing notions of globalization, democracy, empire, terrorism, the mass media and the Internet, multiculturalism, and affect, followed by consideration of varied alternative or utopian visions of the present and the future. Small research projects, class presentations, and structured assignments lead toward writing a 25-page paper focused on strategies for making change. Critical reading, discussion, and writing skills are emphasized. Prerequisite: Senior standing as an American studies major. Four credit hours. U.

AM493Cs  Seminar: Space, Culture, and Neoliberalism  The spaces we live in are meaningful, shaping our behaviors, experiences, and our senses of ourselves and others. We will examine how ideas, practices, and structures of power are written on our landscapes, focusing particularly on how neoliberalism has produced our spaces and culture over the last forty years. Students learn different approaches to interpreting space and landscapes, research and write a major paper analyzing neoliberal
space, and present that research at the Colby Liberal Arts Symposium. *Prerequisite:* Senior standing as an American studies major. *Four credit hours.*