AMERICAN STUDIES

Director, Associate Professor Laura Saltz (American Studies)
Professor Margaret McFadden; Associate Professor Lisa Arellano; Assistant Professor Benjamin Lisle

Advisory Committee: Professors Cedric Bryant (English), James Fleming (Science, Technology, and Society), and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes (African-American Studies and Sociology); Associate Professors Lisa Arellano (American Studies and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies), Chandra Bhimull (African-American Studies and Anthropology), Maple Rasza (Anthropology and Global Studies), Tanya Sheehan (Art), Katherine Stubbs (English), and Steve Wurtzler (Cinema Studies); Assistant Professors Benjamin Lisle (American Studies), Jay Sibara (English), and Natalie Zelensky (Music)

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 or visual culture course); and two electives at or 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
  • 365 Space, Place, and Belonging
• 373 The Anthropology of Gender and Sexuality
• 374 Public Anthropology
• 421 Anthropology of Creativity

Art
• 279 20th-Century Art
• 423 Modern Exhibition Culture

Cinema Studies
• 215 The Image of Women and Men in American Film
• 243 Narrative Film Production
• 245 Documentary Video Production: An Editor’s Perspective
• 248 Digital Publishing: Telling Stories Online
• 251 History of International Cinema I
• 284 Documentary Film: History and Theory
• 298A Visual Storytelling: Found Materials and the Archive
• 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
• 242 History and Philosophy of Progressive Education
• 322 Social Class and Schooling
• 324 Elite Schooling in Global Context
• 334 Girls, New Civics, and Youth-Fueled Activism

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
• 338 Narratives of Contact and Captivity
• 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
• 413F Author Course: William Faulkner
• 422 Queer Theory and U.S. Literatures and Cultures
• 457 American Gothic Literature
• 493 Seminar in American Literature

Environmental Studies
• 214 Introduction to GIS and Spatial Analysis

French
• 236 Introduction to the Francophone World: The Americas

Global Studies
• 255 Global Health: Critical Perspectives on Health, Care, and Policy
• 352 Global Activism: From Socialist Internationalism to Today
• 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
• 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
• 241 History of Colby College
• 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
• 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
• 328 Radical Ecologies
• 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
• 222 Migration and Migrants in the United States
• 231 Contemporary Social Problems
• 232 Revolutions and Revolutionaries
• 234 Capital Punishment in America
• 243 College in Crisis?
• 247 Universal Health Care: Could It Work Here?
• 252 Race, Ethnicity, and Society
• 259 Activism and Social Movements
• 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
• 359 Sociologies of Slavery and Slave Communities in the United States
• 364 Policing the American City
• 366 American Class Structure

Spanish
• 267 Family/History/Nation: Latina/o Genealogies
• 276 U.S. Latina/Chicana Women Writers

Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
• 201 Introduction to Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
• 223 Critical Race Feminisms and Tap Dance
• 232 Queer Identities and Politics
• 311 Feminist Theories and Methodologies
• 317 Boys to Men
• 341 Gender and Human Rights
• 343 Native and Postcolonial Feminisms
• 483 Seminar (when appropriate)

Course Offerings

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

[AM135B]  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.

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.  U.  LISLE, SALTZ

   Three credit hours.  S, U.

AM217s  Religion in the Americas  Listed as Religious Studies 217.
   Four credit hours.  H.  O’NEIL

[AM221]  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.

AM222s  Maine’s Musical Soundscapes: Ethnography of Maine  Listed as Music 222.
   Four credit hours.  A.  ZELENSKY

AM224s  Practice of Digital Scholarship  A humanities lab that explores the concepts, methods, and tools of digital scholarship.
Students learn how to create and manage digital archives, map cultural artifacts and landscapes, data-mine textual sources, and produce media-rich online projects. We combine archival investigation (in Colby's Special Collections), ethnographic fieldwork, and technical skill building with interdisciplinary modes of analysis drawn from history, geography, and cultural studies. Students will collaboratively develop research projects, which will contribute to Digital Maine, an online platform for public scholarship (http://web.colby.edu/digitalmaine/).

Four credit hours. Lisle

[AM226] 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.

[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

AM236f Introduction to the Francophone World: The Americas  Listed as French 236.  Four credit hours. I. MAUGUIERE

[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.


AM256f African-American Art  Listed as Art 256.  Four credit hours. A, U. SHEEHAN

[AM258] American Art 1650-1900  Listed as Art 158.  Four credit hours. A.

[AM259] American Art since 1900  Listed as Art 159.  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

[AM285] History of Photography  Listed as Art 285.  Four credit hours. A.

AM297f Art, Community, and Ethical Urban Development  We explore how buildings and neighborhoods can be platforms for art, culture, and community. How might we ethically redevelop urban spaces, constructing sustainable places that value beauty and resident
rights over narrow profit logics? We examine particularly Waterville and Washington Park, on Chicago's South Side, as case studies. In this interdisciplinary humanities lab, foregrounding experiential and community-oriented learning, we will partner with a course at the University of Chicago being taught by artist Theaster Gates and visit Chicago once. 


[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.

AM342f  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 activist 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.  ARELLANO

[AM344]  Black Radical Imaginations  Listed as Anthropology 344.  Four credit hours.

AM347f  Art and Maine  Listed as Art 347.  Four credit hours.  SHEEHAN

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

[AM357]  Civil Rights, Black Power, and Social Change  Listed as Sociology 357.  Four credit hours.  S, U.

[AM358]  Photography and Migration  Listed as Art 358.  Four credit hours.  U.

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.

AM458s American Art in a Global Context Listed as Art 458. Four credit hours. U. SHEEHAN

AM483f 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

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—as a political, economic, and ideological project—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. LISLE