AMERICAN STUDIES

Director, Professor Tanya Sheehan (Art)
Professor Margaret McFadden; Associate Professor Laura Saltz; Assistant Professors Laura Fugikawa and Benjamin Lisle; Faculty Fellow Amber Hickey

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 (Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies), Chandra Bhimull (African-American Studies and Anthropology), Maple Rasza (Anthropology and Global Studies), Katherine Stubbs (English), and Steve Wurtzler (Cinema Studies); Assistant Professors Damon Mayrl (Sociology), 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 four courses taken off campus 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
- 232 Oral History Ethnographic Research Lab: Waterville Main Street
- 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
- 334 Black Radical Imaginations
• 341 Culture, Mobility, Identity: Encounters in the African Diaspora
• 361 Militaries, Militarization, and War
• 365 Space, Place, and Belonging
• 373 The Anthropology of Gender and Sexuality
• 374 Public Anthropology
• 421 Anthropology of Creativity

Art

• 216 Facing America: Race and Representation, 1492 to the Present
• 244 Moving Images: Magic Lantern to Virtual Reality
• 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
• 247 Visual Storytelling: Found Materials and the Archive
• 248 Digital Publishing: Telling Stories Online
• 251 History of International Cinema I
• 284 Documentary Film: History and Theory
• 286 U.S. Cinema: The Studio System, 1930-1960
• 287 1930s U.S. Media
• 297 Video Games and Game Studies
• 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
• 245 Dimensions of Educational Equity
• 249 Achievement Gap
• 322 Social Class and Schooling
• 324 Elite Schooling in Global Context

English

• 239 Literature Against Distortion
• 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
• 283 Environmental Humanities
• 331 Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville
• 333 Environmental Revolutions in American Literature and Culture
• 336 Early American Women Writers
• 337 Climate Fiction
• 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
• 352 Hang and Rattle: The West in the American Imaginary
• 353 The American Short Story
• 354 Slavery and the American Literary Imagination
• 369 Reading Race Now: 21st-Century Multiethnic-American Literature
• 413A Author Course: Toni Morrison
• 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 Studies
- 236 Introduction to the Francophone World: The Americas
- 351 Minority Issues and Social Change in 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
- 228 Introduction to Race, Ethnicity, and Politics
- 273 American Political Thought
- 312 Suburban Politics
- 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
- 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
- 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
- 248 Nuclear Visions, Environmental Realities
- 283 Golden Diaspora: Modern American Jewish History
- 297 History of the U.S. West
- 2XX Women and Religion in the U.S.
- 330 Global Histories of Food
- 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
- 348 U.S. Environmental History
- 397 Race, Labor, and Gender in the 19th-Century U.S.
- 398 Atlantic World and Beyond: New England in Global History
- 3XX Maine in Japan
- 3XX United States as Empire
- 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
• 297 Philosophy of Sex and Gender
• 328 Radical Ecologies
• 352 American Philosophy

Psychology
• 253 Social Psychology

Religious Studies
• 217 Religion in the Americas
• 221 The Jews of Maine
• 232 American Spirituality and the Environment
• 256 The African-American Religious Experience
• 257 Women in American Religion
• 285 Faith, Class, and Community
• 297 Religion and Politics in the U.S.
• 312 Global South Asia: Literature, Art, Environment
• 319 Bollywood and Beyond: South Asian Religions through Film
• 357 Jesus Christ Superstar: The Bible in Film
• 397 God and the American Essay

Science, Technology, and Society
• 485 Technology Matters

Sociology
• 214J African-American Elites and Middle Classes
• 222 Migration and Migrants in the United States
• 231 Contemporary Social Problems
• 232 Revolutions and Revolutionaries
• 234 Capital Punishment in America
• 236 American Religion and Society
• 238 State, Society, and Politics
• 243 College in Crisis?
• 247 Universal Health Care: Could It Work Here?
• 252 Race, Ethnicity, and Society
• 262 Comparative Perspectives on Inequality
• 266 Gender, Work, and Family
• 268 Social Policy and Inequality
• 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
• 276 U.S. Latina/Chicana Women Writers
• 338 The Diasporic Imagination: Cubans beyond Cuba

Theater and Dance
• 297 Choreography for the Camera: The Art of Athletics

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
• 342 Political Violence: American Cultures of Radicalism
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.  FUGIKAWA

AM1XXs  Social Justice and the City  Humanities lab course.  Four credit hours.  LISLE


[AM217]  Religion in the Americas  Listed as Religious Studies 217.  Four credit hours.  H.

[AM221]  Mapping Waterville  This interdisciplinary humanities lab combines geographical and architectural fieldwork, historical research, digital mapping, and storytelling. Waterville is our learning space. Students work collaboratively to analyze the town’s material and spatial character, track and explain changes across time, locate Waterville in broader contexts of urban and social change, and publish interpretations online using a range of digital tools and platforms.  Four credit hours.  H.

[AM222]  Maine’s Musical Soundscapes: Ethnography of Maine  Listed as Music 222.  Four credit hours.  A.

[AM224]  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.

[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.

AM228f  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.  LISLE
[AM229]  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? In this interdisciplinary humanities lab that foregrounds experiential and community-oriented learning, we will examine artistic, political, and community-based organizations in other cities as models to help us develop our own projects for a more just and equitable Waterville. Previously listed as American Studies 297 (Fall 2017).  Four credit hours.

AM232s  Queer Identities and Politics  Listed as Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies 232.  Four credit hours.  U.  FUGIKAWA

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

AM235f  Made in Maine  We examine how Mainers make meaning through the lens of craft beer cultures, exploring beer as a food, a commodity, an expression of cultural history and artisanal production, a builder of community, an expression of status, and a shaper of the built environment. This is a humanities lab course, combining reading, writing, and discussion with fieldwork, archival research, and digital storytelling.  Four credit hours.  S.  LISLE

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


AM258f  American Art 1650-1900  Listed as Art 158.  Four credit hours.  A.  SPERLING

AM259s  American Art since 1900  Listed as Art 159.  Four credit hours.  A.  SPERLING

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.  SPERLING

AM297f  Activist Art  Focuses on notable developments in activist art from the 18th century to the present, highlighting the relationships between geographically diverse movements — from The Black Panther newspaper's powerful political graphics to rabble-rousing anti-nuclear activism in Japan. We look at the role of art in social movements, while considering the contexts from which these movements emerged in relation to transnational social, environmental, and economic concerns. The class looks at different activist tactics and forms each week, such as protest walks, grassroots counter-surveillance, and political printmaking, providing students with the tools to analyze how the visuality of activism has developed over time. Students will create a final activist art project.  Four credit hours.  U.  HICKEY

AM298s  Surveillance Culture  Introduction to the history and contemporary manifestations of surveillance culture in the United States and its global implications. We ask, what is the role of surveillance in American culture, and how does it shape our bodies, behaviors, relationships, communities, and political possibilities? We look at how surveillance unevenly affects marginalized communities, and consider how artists and activists have responded to surveillance culture through re-purposing these technologies into tools of resistance. Students will familiarize themselves with surveillance technologies, such as iris scanning and drone imaging.  Four credit hours.  U.  HICKEY

[AM342]  Political Violence: American Cultures of Radicalism  Listed as Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies 342.  Four credit hours.  U.

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

[AM347]  Art and Maine  Listed as Art 347.  Four credit hours.

[AM348]  Race, Sex, and Violence in Popular Culture  Draws together work on histories of racialization, sexual representation, and visual narrative analysis in order to consider how popular culture teaches us to see and understand bodies. With support from Academic Information Technology, we will focus centrally on the production of critical viewing guides (video essays) and the development of a website.
Prerequisite: American Studies 171 or WG 201. Four credit hours. U.


[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.

[AM366] Race, Gender, and the Graphic Novel Engages the lenses of race, gender, and sexuality in an analysis of graphic novels. In the United States visual representations have long played a role in creating meanings associated with racialized bodies. How have writers used this visual and literary genre to address social inequalities and explore gendered experiences of racialization? How have people of color, queer, and trans writers transformed the canon of graphic novels? What knowledge, ideas and effects emerge from reading graphic novels, and what makes the form unique? Four credit hours. L, U.

[AM375] 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.

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: American Studies 171 or Art 101, and sophomore or higher standing. Four credit hours. U.

Hickey

[AM397] Comparative Ethnic Studies Through a rigorous engagement with theories and histories of racialization, we identify key themes in the study and representation of race in the United States. We will interrogate contemporary scholars' theories on how different groupings have been differentially racialized, locally and nationally, to different effects. We will focus on the historical roles played by the state and by industry in practices of colonization and differential racialization, as well as on the histories of cross-ethnic and inter-ethnic organizing that have emerged in response to unequal access to power and resources. Prerequisite: American Studies 171 or Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies 201. Four credit hours. U.

AM398s Land, Sovereignty, and Art Examines how Indigenous artists and activists respond visually to issues related to land and sovereignty. We look at a broad range of media used by Indigenous creative practitioners, including documentary filmmaking, printmaking, photography, and performance. While we focus mainly on case studies in Turtle Island (North America) and Oceania, the issues explored are relevant across the globe - from the Maori of Aotearoa to the Lenca of Honduras and El Salvador. Students will leave with an understanding of the landscape of decolonial "movement culture," as well as the theoretical and methodological building blocks to delve into these issues in ways that challenge the legacies of colonial research and representation. Students write several essays and create original movement art. Prerequisite: American Studies 171. Four credit hours. Hickey


[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. U.

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—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