
AMERICAN STUDIES DEPARTMENT

Chair, *Associate Professor Laura Saltz*

Professor Margaret McFadden; Associate Professor Laura Saltz; Assistant Professors Laura Fugikawa and Benjamin Lisle; Visiting Assistant Professor Natalie Michelle; Visiting Instructor Chelsea Fairbank

Advisory Committee: *Professor Tanya Sheehan (Art); Associate Professors Chandra Bhimull (African-American Studies and Anthropology), Damon Mayrl (Sociology), Maple Rasza (Anthropology and Global Studies), Katherine Stubbs (English), Steve Wurtzler (Cinema Studies), and Natalie Zelensky (Music); Assistant Professors Gail Carlson (Environmental Studies), Gwyneth Shanks (Performance, Theater, and Dance), and Jay Sibara (Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies)*

American studies offers innovative courses in the areas of social justice, cultural geography, environmental humanities, visual and popular culture, race and ethnicity, Indigeneity, and gender and sexuality. It is a highly interdisciplinary and transnationally oriented program that provides students with the tools to examine critically the stories about America that drove its history—from early beliefs in Manifest Destiny and imperial expansion, to the contemporary elevation of capitalist competition as the central model of social and economic interaction—and those narratives that have historically been marginalized.

Redesigned in 2020, the major and minor offer students strong foundations in the theories and methods of American studies as well as an exciting array of electives that include experiential learning and civic engagement.

Students in the Class of 2024 and beyond will follow the new major requirements. Students in the Class of 2023 are encouraged to do so as well, while others should consult their program advisors.

New Requirements for the Major in American Studies

The American studies major requires 11 courses in the following categories:

1. Core courses: 171, 293, and 393.
2. Electives: two American Studies courses and five additional courses selected from an approved list provided by the program advisor and posted to the [program website](#). At least three electives are taken at the 300 level or above. No more than two can be taken outside the program at the 100 level. Electives are used to cover the following areas relevant to American studies: pre-20th century; the U.S. in a global or transnational context; praxis (broadly defined as political or civic engagement, digital humanities, public humanities, creative writing, multimedia storytelling, or other relevant experience-based learning). Where appropriate, each elective can fulfill more than one of these required areas. Additionally, electives must include two courses focused on social justice, which investigate the ways that social inequities have been produced, maintained, and/or challenged. These courses often examine how power works—historically, spatially, and differentially—across axes of race, Indigeneity, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, and economic class.
3. Senior seminar: 493.

Of the required courses, 171 is normally taken before the end of the second year.

All majors develop a [concentration](#), which is a thematic or conceptual focus. After declaring the major, students submit a narrative of approximately three pages to their program advisor. It names and describes the concentration, articulates a rationale for it, and explains how specific courses will support it. The program provides example concentrations, although students should tailor these to their individual interests through extensive consultation with their program advisor. Electives are generally selected to support the concentration.

To encourage a greater sense of intentionality and reflection in the choice of concentration and path through the major, students work with their program advisors to complete an online portfolio. The portfolio begins with the narrative description of the concentration described above. Students complete the other components of the portfolio in response to prompts issued by program faculty within the core courses of the major. These prompts ask students to identify emerging areas of interest, draw connections among courses, draw connections between courses and the concentration, refine the description of the concentration, and pose unresolved questions.

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 three courses taken off campus may be counted toward the major.

Old Requirements for the Major in American Studies

This 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.

Honors Program

Students majoring in American studies may apply at the end of 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."

Requirements for the Minor in American Studies

The minor requires at least seven courses: 171; either 293 or 393; and five electives selected from an approved list provided by the program director and posted to the [program website](#). Two of those electives must fulfill the social justice area described above. At least one elective should be taken at the 300 level or above. No more than two electives outside the program can be taken at the 100 level. No more than two courses taken off campus may be counted toward the minor.

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

[AM120C] Social Justice and the City In this writing intensive course, we examine ways that cultural, economic, and political power is expressed and resisted through urban social and spatial relations. Why do cities exist? Whose interests do they serve? How might they work differently? We explore topics that include gentrification, homelessness, the "right to the city," social activism, immigration, and environmental justice. Students learn how to interpret the city through various methods—including textual analysis, geographical fieldwork, and digital storytelling and mapping. *Four credit hours.* W1, U.

AM125f Introduction to African American Cultures Listed as African-American Studies 125. *Four credit hours.* L, U.
DONALDSON

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

AM197f Land, Sovereignty, and Cultural Identity Beginning with an historical overview of first contact and colonial occupation in the Northeast, the course offers a comparative examination of the cultural identities, traditional values, and decision-making processes of indigenous peoples that tie them to the greater ecology. The course explores the historical and legal impediments to Indigenous peoples access to culturally significant resources, as well as Natives traditional and non-traditional strategies of resistance. Focusing on Wabanaki of Maine, the course features an in-depth study of the histories and treaties that shaped coastal fisheries both before and after Maine statehood. *Four credit hours.* U. MICHELLE

[AM216] Deconstructing *Daughters of the Dust*: African American Origins Listed as African-American Studies 216. *Three credit hours.* S, U.

[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.

[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.

[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.**

[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. *Four credit hours.*

[AM232] Queer Identities and Politics Listed as Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies 232. *Four credit hours.* **U.**

[AM235] 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.**

AM238f Making Modern Science This introduction to the global history of science examines formations of scientific knowledge from the 17th century to the present. What historical narratives have been told about scientific progress? What forms of knowledge do these stories privilege? Who counts as a scientist? How has science been influenced by religion, literature, and art? By professionalization, industrialization, and politics? Focusing on the US, we will read, discuss, and write about topics such as evolution and racial science, physics and the atomic bomb, and the discovery of DNA and genomics, considering today's controversies - including masking and vaccination - in light of the past. *Four credit hours.* **H, U.** SALTZ

AM244s Introduction to Asian American Studies Using an interdisciplinary approach, we ask who is Asian American, what does it mean to be Asian American and what are the diverse experiences of Asian Americans in contemporary society? We look at these questions through history, literature, culture, social movements, and the lens of genders and sexualities. Students will discuss the significance of key historical, cultural, social and political moments in Asian American history and experiences; have a deeper understanding of how ethnicity, region and religion in confluence with the co-construction of race, class, gender, sexuality, & citizenship impact Asian American experiences. *Four credit hours.* **U.** FUGIKAWA

[AM245] Land, Sovereignty, and Art Examines how Indigenous artists and activists respond visually to issues related to land, power, and social justice. We look at a broad range of media used by Indigenous peoples, including documentary filmmaking, printmaking, photography, and performance. While we focus on case studies in North America, the issues explored are relevant across the globe. We discuss Indigenous epistemologies related to land and mapping, and the ways in which these knowledge systems are mobilized in resistance to settler colonialism. Students leave equipped with theories and methods used to challenge the legacies of colonial research and representation. They complete several creative assignments and write a final essay. Counts as an elective toward the ES major and minor. Previously offered as American Studies 298B (Spring 2020). *Four credit hours.* **U.**

[AM247] History of U.S. Political Violence Focuses on the complex history and representation of "revolutionary" American political behavior with emphasis on practices of political violence alongside representations of these practices. The course draws together case studies of radical and militant political movements and actors from across the twentieth century in order 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 "violent" 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 environmental movements. *Four credit hours.* **U.**

[AM248] Activist Art Focuses on the role of art in social movements from the 18th century to the present. We look at different activist tactics and forms each week, such as protest walks, grassroots counter-surveillance, and political printmaking. Students will create a final activist art project. This is a Colby Across the Walls course, and students will travel to Mountain View Correctional Facility several times during the semester. Previously offered as American Studies 297 (Fall 2019). *Four credit hours.* **U.**

AM254s 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. Previously offered as American Studies 298 (Spring 2020). *Four credit hours.* **U.** SALTZ

[AM254J] 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. *Three credit hours.* **U.**

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

AM293s Methods in American Studies Provides an overview of key methods in American Studies. Students put methods into practice through their analysis of archives, textual and visual artifacts, music, maps, the built environment, oral narratives, and more. Students analyze their own research practices through discussions of research ethics, the impact of research beyond academia, and the politics of consent. They complete a series of short essays, creative exercises, and a final research project proposal in which they discuss the ways their proposed methods illuminate a topic relevant to the emphases of the American Studies major (race, gender, ethnicity, Indigeneity, sexuality, ability, economic class). *Four credit hours.* LISLE

AM337f Gentrification Gentrification is a process of class "upgrading" that leads to the marginalization or displacement of residents or businesses. In this reading- and writing-intensive course, we examine gentrification's historical roots and evolution over time from a small-scale, middle-class process built on "sweat equity" to a mass-produced global one endemic to neoliberal governance. Participants will familiarize themselves with major debates in gentrification scholarship, gentrification's different manifestations (e.g. tourist, rural, and "studentification"), and how people resist it, before completing a significant independent research project. *Prerequisite:* Sophomore standing or above. *Four credit hours.* **U.** LISLE

[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.**

[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] Race, Gender, and 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:* 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

AM397f Indigenous Peoples, Climate Change, and Power This discussion-based class examines critical issues facing Indigenous peoples throughout North America due to colonialism, climate change and environmental injustices. Students explore theories of structural power in the context of (de)colonization, synthesizing them with current environmental, political, and legal logics applied by Indigenous nations as they participate in the global response to a warming world. By re-thinking colonialism, the course analyzes ideologies that perpetuate environmental devastation and the Indigenous movements that are dynamically changing the narratives around resistance, justice, relationships, and knowledge. *Four credit hours.* **U.** FAIRBANK

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

AM493s Senior Seminar: Capstone Project Students design and execute an advanced, original research project in this capstone course for senior majors in American studies. Working closely with the instructor, participants work through a series of steps including a research proposal, consultations with librarians, multiple drafts, and collaborative workshopping ? resulting in a twenty-five page final paper. Prerequisite: senior major or minor in American studies. *Prerequisite:* Senior standing as an American Studies major or minor. *Four credit hours.* LISLE

[AM493C] Capstone Project and Neoliberalism

Students design and execute an advanced, original research project in this capstone course for senior majors in American studies. Working closely with the instructor, participants work through a series of steps — including a research proposal, consultations with librarians, multiple drafts, and collaborative workshopping — resulting in a twenty-five page final paper. Prerequisite: senior major or minor in American studies. *Prerequisite:* Senior standing as an American studies major. *Four credit hours.*

[AM493D] Senior Seminar: Interrogating Whiteness This capstone guides students through the process of designing, researching, and writing a major paper on a topic that interrogates whiteness. "White" is a constructed racial category, but it often remains invisible in American discourses on race. Students will analyze the histories, structures, and representations of whiteness in the US. Why, despite US disavowals of racism, does racial injustice persist? How does white privilege intersect with gender and class to produce social, spatial, legal, political, environmental, and economic inequalities? What is white supremacy? What forms does antiracism take? Students present their research at CLAS. *Prerequisite:* American Studies 393. *Four credit hours.*