

AMST 304 :: Fall 2011

Senior Seminar in American Studies

Tuesday and Thursday :: 3:30PM to 4:45PM

Instructors

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Introduction

The year-long Senior Seminar (AMST-304 and AMST-305) is the capstone experience in American Studies at Georgetown University. In this course, fourth-year students design, research, author, and present their senior theses.

The seminar follows two intertwining threads: Praxis and Theory of American Studies. Praxis leads students through the practical stages of conceptualizing a thesis topic, planning a research strategy, and choosing a thesis advisor. We address pragmatic approaches to writing, the importance of rewriting, strategies for productivity and time management, and dealing with procrastination.

The second thread, Theory, encourages students to reflect on issues relevant to their own sense of place and progress in the evolving field of American Studies. Assigned readings and in-class discussions will focus on themes that have shaped and reshaped the field over the past half-century.

Course Goals

1. The fundamental goal of this course is to help students define and defend their senior theses. By the end of the this semester, we will have achieved the following:
 - Each student will have identified a research problem that they can clearly articulate.
 - Each student will know the form their thesis will take.
 - Each student will be able to identify, with specificity, the various disciplinary conventions (vocabularies; methods; literatures) upon which their research will depend.
 - Each student will develop a sense of how to interact with professors, advisers, TAs and technology.
2. Students are exposed to theoretical, analytical, and methodological approaches from diverse perspectives and periods in American intellectual history. Disciplines represented include history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, literary studies, and popular culture, among others.
3. Students are given the opportunity to undertake a complex and ambitious project, organize their time, research process and goals.
4. Students are encouraged to use the thesis as an opportunity to pursue themes or topics that have mattered to them during their tenure at Georgetown.
5. As they progress in their theses, students work closely with American Studies faculty and faculty mentors drawn from every part of the University.
6. In building and sustaining their interdisciplinary theses, students synthesize and critically evaluate knowledge from diverse fields.
7. Students are encouraged to incorporate innovative scholarly approaches into their thesis projects.
8. Students make significant use of novel digital technologies in the formulation, research, and presentation of their thesis projects.

Required Texts

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: W. W. Norton. 2010.

Writing well requires mastering key rhetorical moves, the most important of which involves summarizing what others have said (“they say”) in order to set up an argument (“I say”).

Booth, Wayne C. and Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: U. C. Press. 2008.

The definitive text on doing research *that matters*. Booth and company emphasize the ethical dimension of scholarship.

Course Projects

The first semester will include three major assignments, each of which is calculated to contribute to your thesis project, primarily in terms of *inventio*.

Intellectual Genealogy

For your first project, you will devise a personal “intellectual genealogy:” A sort of family tree of thought. As thinking persons, our ideas do not come to us *ex nihilo*: They are the products of the books we read, the networks in which we live, the tutors we seek out, the ideas thrust upon us. By devising your intellectual genealogy, you will be better able to see the often invisible coincidences and unimagined conspiracies that shape even your most personal thought. By reflecting on this genealogy, you may come to understand better the direction in which your thesis should proceed. At the very least, you will understand why your thesis is not entirely your own.

The only formal requirement for this assignment is that it *not* be rendered as a conventional print-based narrative: It might take the form of, instead, a spoken word MP3, a ballad, a short film, an HTML page, a full-color chart. The only requirements are that it must be archivable, reproduceable, autonomous (*i.e.*, separable from the author).

Literature Review

During this semester, you will draft a *literature review* of roughly 15 - 20 pages. As you familiarize yourself with the literature in your area of inquiry, you will soon begin to distinguish invaluable articles from lesser contributions. For this project, you will gather and write about roughly 10 significant (or interesting) articles, chapters, or essays from your research. This will form the basis of your “lit review” chapter.

Research Statement Video

Your final project for the semester is a video record of your research statement. The capstone of the first semester, this collaboratively-produced, 90-second video presents a cogent, concise statement summarizing the nature and scope of your senior seminar project.

Tumblr

Throughout the semester, students will use Tumblr (www.tumblr.com) as a space to organize, archive, and share their research process. Tumblr provides a handy, online journal for process, allowing students to write down ideas, post free-writes and links to resources. Tumblr creates a collaborative collage-space for students to think through and share sites of inspiration and sources of intellectual curiosity.

Grades

Intellectual Genealogy: 20%

Literature Review: 20%

Research Statement Video: 20%

Tumblr: 15%

Class Participation: 10%

Timeline: 5%

Adviser Agreement: 5%

Rubric: 5%

The Fine Print

Participation

Your thoughtful participation in the seminar is vital to the integrity of this course. You should come prepared not only to answer questions about the readings, but to ask questions, too, and to raise alternative points of view.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory.

Four unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course. If your fourth unexcused absence occurs before the "W" deadline, I may withdraw you from the course. If it occurs after the "W" deadline, you may receive a course grade of F. Neither the professor nor the student can initiate a withdrawal after the deadline. It is your responsibility to initiate withdrawal proceedings prior to the "W" deadline. If you have questions, please speak with me.

Tardiness

If you are late for class or leave early on more than two occasions, it may affect your grade. ("Late" means arriving more than 5 minutes after the scheduled class time.)

Academic Honesty

The administrative arms of schools, departments, and programs spend a lot of time decrying plagiarism but often fail to acknowledge the increasing complexity of matters of attribution and authority. The line between plagiarism and sufficient attribution is not always clear. The best way to avoid plagiarism is to make a good-faith effort: Take notes on your sources as you read and cite everything even as you draft. When in doubt, cite the source text: In my experience, most cases of accidental plagiarism could have been avoided with a few circumspect footnotes.

Intentional plagiarism, on the other hand, is entirely unacceptable, and is grounds for failing the course, at least. I will immediately notify senior American Studies faculty of any instances of intentional plagiarism.

Schedule

Thursday, Sept 1: Introductions

Tuesday, Sept 6: Genealogical Thinking

Read: Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids"

Thursday, Sept 8: The Intellectual Genealogy

Tuesday, Sept 13: Why We Think As We Do

Read: Menand, "Pragmatism"

Thursday, Sept 15: Choosing a Topic

Tuesday, Sept 20: What's American About America?

Read: Kouwenhoven, "What's American About America?"

Thursday, Sept 22: Technology

Tuesday, Sept 27: Technology II

Thursday, Sept 29: Method

Tuesday, Oct 4: Nash Smith, "Can American Studies Develop a Method?"

Thursday, Oct 6: Structure

Due: Intellectual Genealogy

Tuesday, Oct 11: Susman, "History and the American Intellectual: Uses of a Usable Past"

Thursday, Oct 13: Citation

Read: Chapter 2, "Thinking in Print," *The Craft of Research*

Tuesday, Oct 18: Paradigm Drama

Read: Wise, "Paradigm Dramas in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement"

Thursday, Oct 20: Interdisciplinarity

Read: Mansilla, "Assessing Student Work at the Disciplinary Crossroads"

Tuesday, Oct 25: Interdisciplinarity II

Read: Fish, "Being Interdisciplinary Is So Very Hard To Do"

Thursday, Oct 27: Advisers

Due: Thesis timeline

Tuesday, Nov 1: Rhetoric of the Visual

Read: Tufte, "The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint"

Thursday, Nov 3: American Studies Alumnae

Tuesday, Nov 8: The Experiential in Scholarship

Read: Lipsitz, "Listening to Learn, Learning to Listen"

Thursday, Nov 10: Drafting

Read: Part 2, "I Say," of *They Say, I Say*

Tuesday, Nov 15: Hayles, "Scholarship in New Media and Beyond

Thursday, Nov 17: Research Video

Due: Literature Review

Thursday, Nov 29: Research Video

Tuesday, Dec 1: Technology and Knowledge in American Studies

Thursday, Dec 6: A productive break

Saturday, Dec 17: Research Video due (midnight)