

# INTRODUCTION TO THEORIES AND METHODS IN AMERICAN STUDIES

## Theme: Sustaining Cultures and Environments in the Americas

### AMST 340

Fall 2010



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Welcome to AMST 340! Introduction to Theories and Methods in American Studies is a class for AMST majors, the first of a two-part set of courses that will culminate in your capstone project for the major. In the senior capstone project in AMST 450, you will produce a piece of original research on a topic you propose and develop in consultation with your professors and with feedback from your peers. In AMST 340, you will develop the formal proposal for your capstone project while expanding your knowledge of American Studies research and methods. We shall concentrate on learning about the kinds of research American Studies scholars care about today and how students and scholars perform interdisciplinary research.

This semester AMST 340 will focus on a broad theme: sustaining cultures and environments in the Americas. Sustainability is much in the news today and our class will examine the four pillars of this ethos: **environmental responsibility, economic health, social equity, and cultural vitality**. How does (or doesn't) American studies scholarship use its cultural lenses to think about sustainability, broadly defined? How seriously do we think we should embrace sustainability in our research, our communities, and our everyday lives? We will use our theme to consider how "environmental problems are fundamentally based in how human society is organized" and to establish some common ground to help our class function as an effective learning community.

That said, we will devote much of AMST 340 to helping you, as an AMST major, find a research question you care about, devise research methods to study that question, and cultivate your voice as a scholar/citizen. You should expect to put in a lot of effort defining your topic, articulating it in the form of a clear research question, searching in both the library and online for relevant sources, and developing an interdisciplinary research method to answer your key question. In addition, AMST 340 is also designed to help you locate yourself as a practitioner of American studies and identify where and how your research interests fit into the broader scholarship of our field. To do that, we will read and discuss a sampling of American studies scholarship; the readings will include both conceptual essays setting out key American studies concepts and research applications.

AMST 340 asks that you participate as an engaged learner and an active member of this American Studies learning community. You will need to take responsibility for your own research project, and support your fellow students by providing critical but friendly feedback to help them shape their research proposals and consider new ideas or new angles on their topics. Success in both AMST 340 and AMST 450 is highly correlated with finding effective ways to save yourself from your worst procrastination tendencies.

Here are the Learning Objectives for AMST 340:

- Develop each student's voice and contributions as an American studies researcher
- Expand your knowledge of and refine your analytical skills for understanding scholarship currently resonating in our field
- Craft a research proposal for your capstone project
- Hone your library and online research skills
- Learn to provide effective and constructive feedback to help your fellow students broaden their thinking and improve their research proposals

## COURSE CALENDAR

NOTE: Classes marked with an asterisk (\*) will meet in McKeldin Library. All other classes meet in Room 1108 HLZ. All readings except the Caughey and George books will be available on elms.

Aug 30: Introductions of several kinds

Assignment: Choose one text you appreciated from a previous American Studies class and be prepared to describe it and explain how it is interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary. To be presented during our next class. Aim for a one-minute sound byte.

Sep 1: American Studies: Past, Present, Future. Who are you as an American Studies major?

Readings: Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, "Introduction," in *American Culture Studies* (2006), 1-21; John Caughey, "Individuals and their Cultures," in *Negotiating Cultures and Identities* (2006), 3-22; Definitions of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary (ACS website); Google—search for: Define interdisciplinary.

Assignment: Bring to the next class a 1-sentence title or description of your provisional research topic.

Sep 6: No Class – Labor Day

Sep 8: American Studies Research as Inquiry...and Passion.  
Topic selection and brainstorming exercise. Guest speaker: Stephanie Stevenson

Readings: Mary George, *The Elements of Library Research*, 1-52.

Assignment: Personal Blog I: Finding your voice: Who am I as an American Studies researcher and what kind of research do I want to do?

### Resonant Frameworks and Concepts for American Studies

Sep 13: Sustainability I: Definition and basic concepts

Readings: Wikipedia entry on "Sustainability" (yep, the whole thing); Brundtland Commission, "Towards Sustainable Development," in Stephen M. Wheeler and Timothy Beatley, *The Sustainable Development Reader* (2004), 53-57; Herman E. Daly and Kenneth N. Townsend, "Valuing the Earth: Economics, Ecology, Ethics"; cheatsheet: "What is Sustainability?" ([www.sustainablemeasures.com](http://www.sustainablemeasures.com)).

Sep 15: Sustainability II: View *The Garden* (in class), a film by Scott Hamilton Kennedy.

Readings: Jon Hawkes, "The Application of Culture" in *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability* (2004), 11-26; and two cheatsheets: "Culture: the Fourth Pillar of Sustainability," (CECC Cultural Resources Salon, [www.cultureandcommunities.ca](http://www.cultureandcommunities.ca)); "Sustainability Conference – 2005" (1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Environmental, Culture, Economic, and Social Sustainability," [s05.cgpublisher.com](http://s05.cgpublisher.com)).

Sep 20: \*Library Research I. Guest Speaker: Eric Lindquist, Librarian

Reading: George, *The Elements of Library Research*, 52-84.  
Assignment: Research Worksheet I

Sign-up for first round of conferences

Sep 22: Sustainability III: The Fourth Pillar. How does American Studies critique Sustainability?

Reading: Adrian Parr, "The Greening of Junkspace," in Hijacking Sustainability (2009), 15-31.

Assignment: Class Blog: Sustainability Resources, Ideas, Contributions

Sep 27: Individual Conferences with Professor: No Class.

Sep 29: Racial formation theories

Readings: Michael Omi & Howard Winant, "Racial Formation," in Racial Formation in the United States (1994), 53-76; Mae M. Ngai, "The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 and the Reconstruction of Race in Immigration Law," in Janice A. Radway, et al, American Studies: An Anthology (2009), 69-77; Sunaina Marr Maira, "To Be Young, Brown, and Hip: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Indian American Youth Culture," in Radway, 299-306; Laura Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California," in Radway, 465-475.

Oct 4: \*Library Research II. Guest Speaker: Eric Lindquist.

Reading: George, Elements of Library Research, 85-125; Ballenger, "The Second Week," excerpts, from The Curious Researcher (2009), 64-68.

Assignment: Research Worksheet II

Oct 6: Intersectionality and Inequalities

Readings: Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana, "Critical Thinking about Inequality: An Emerging Lens," in Emerging Intersections: Race, Class, and Gender in Theory, Policy, and Practice (2009), 1-13; Lynn Weber, excerpts from Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework (2001), 10-30; Dorceta Taylor, "Women of Color, Environmental Justice, and Ecofeminism," in Karen Warren, Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, and Nature (1997), 38-81.

Oct 11:\*Library Research III. Guest Speaker: Eric Lindquist

Readings: Bruce Ballenger, "The Second Week," excerpts, from The Curious Researcher, 61-98.

Oct. 13: Gender, Body, Sexuality, Politics

Readings: "Body," by Eva Cherniavsky, "Gender," by Judith Halberstam, and "Sex," by Bruce Burgett, in Keywords for American Culture Studies (2007), 26-29, 116-120, and 217-221, respectively; Victoria Ortiz and Jennifer Elrod, "Construction Project: Color Me Queer + Color Me Family = Camilo's Story," in Crossroads,

Directions, and a New Critical Race Theory (2002), 258-273; Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in H. Abelove, et al., The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader (1993), 100-133.

Oct. 18: Globalization

Readings: Globalization entry from Wikipedia (yup, the whole thing); Elizabeth McAlister, "The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street Revisited: Vodou and Haitian Catholicism in the Age of Transnationalism," in Radway, American Studies, 233-245.

Oct. 20: No Class: Complete Research Worksheets II and III and prepare for individual conferences on your proposals.

Oct. 25: No Class: Individual Meetings II

Examples of Methods and Approaches: Systematic "How to" Thinking

Oct. 27: Ethnography and Life Writing

Reading: Caughey, Negotiating Cultures and Identities (NCI), 23-92; Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, "The Sound of It Stayed in my Ears: Life History with African American Domestic," in NCI, 177-190.

Nov. 1: Popular Culture I: Background History, Studying Production and Consumption

Reading: Neil Campbell and Alisdair Kean, "The Transmission of American Culture," in American Cultural Studies, 287-314; Aeron Davis, "Investigating Cultural Producers," and Anneke Meyer, "Investigating Cultural Consumers," in Michael Pickering, ed., Research Methods for Cultural Studies (2009), 53-86.

Nov. 3: Popular Culture II: Studies in Sustainability

Reading: George Lipsitz, "Mardi Gras Indians: Carnival and Counter-Narrative in Black New Orleans," in Radway, 290-298; Adrian Parr, "Green Idol," in Hijacking Sustainability, 33-48.

Nov. 8: Material Culture Studies

Reading: E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model," in Thomas J. Schlereth, Material Culture Studies in America (1982), 162-173; Psyche Williams-Forsen, "Traveling the Chicken Bone Express," in Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power (2006), 114-134; Nan Enstad, "Toxicity and the Consuming Subject," in Russ Castronovo and Susan Gillman, eds., States of Emergency: The Object of American Studies, 55-68.

Nov. 10: Cultural Landscape Studies

Reading: Jeremy Korr, "Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model" (Appendix from Korr dissertation, *Washington's Main Street*, 2002); Luis Aponte-Pares, "Appropriating Place in Puerto Rican Barrios: Preserving Contemporary Urban Landscapes," in Arnold Alanen and Robert Melnick, *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America* (2000), 94-111; Eilat Feuer and Daniel Winterbottom, "Hopeless Future For Gardens of Hope? Exhibition at El Museo del Barrio" (1998), <http://www.cityfarmer.org/casitas.html>; Carlos "Tato" Torres, "Rincon Criollo: More Than Just a Little House in the South Bronx," <http://nylatinojournal.com/home/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=22>;

### Sustainability Case Studies

Nov. 15: Suburbia: View The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream (in class), a film by Gregory Greene.

Nov. 17: No Class: Writing Day. Use this day to complete a draft of your research proposal.

Assignment: Complete draft of research proposal due to be posted on elms by Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Nov. 22: Is Suburban Life sustainable? Do we want it to be?

Reading: Tom Hine, "Taking Off" and "The Luckiest Generation," in Populuxe (1986), 2-36; David M. P. Freund, "Marketing the Free Market: State Intervention in the Politics of Prosperity in Metropolitan America," in Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, The New Suburban History (2006), 11-32; Dolores Hayden, excerpts from A Field Guide to Sprawl (2004).

Assignment: Peer review of three student drafts.

Nov. 24: No Class – Thanksgiving Holiday

Nov. 29: New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Readings: Clyde Woods, "Katrina's World: Blues, Bourbon, and the Return to the Source"; Zenia Kish, "'My FEMA People': Hip-Hop as Disaster Recovery in the Katrina Diaspora"; Jordan T. Camp, "'We Know This Place': Neoliberal Racial Regimes and the Katrina Circumstance," and Sunni Patterson, "We Know This Place," all in Clyde Woods, ed., In the Wake of Hurricane Katrina: New Paradigms and Social Visions, American Quarterly (Sept. 2009), 427-453, 671-721; Wai Chee Dimock, "World History according to Katrina," in State of Emergency, 143-160.

Dec. 1: Individual Meetings III

Dec. 6: Research Proposal Presentations I

Dec. 8: Research Proposal Presentations II

Dec. 16: FINAL Exam period 1:30 to 3:30: Research Proposal Presentations III

Final Proposals Due 1:30 pm

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

AMST 340 is a seminar for AMST majors consisting of the following interrelated parts: readings/viewings, class and blog presentations and discussions, short assignments and exercises to develop and get feedback on the research proposal, conferences, peer review of projects/ presentations, and final research presentation and proposal. This is a reading and writing intensive course.

A seminar is a collaborative and cooperative enterprise! In a seminar, students share responsibility for producing stimulating discussions and presenting the results of their research and thinking. Most of you are nearing the end of your undergraduate careers. You have acquired good skills and substantial knowledge about certain facets of American culture. We will hope to take advantage of your accumulated knowledge and experience in building good seminar discussions and a lively class blog. We will work especially hard to build the kind of learning community that fosters stimulating dialogue among students and between students and instructor. Dialogue helps create the kind of engaged critical thinking that leads to good research, lively writing, and the kinds of substantive discussions that can change our thinking about sustainability and what it means to be an American Studies researcher. Our goal will be to encourage each participant's independent thinking, and a class environment that guides each person to discover and articulate his or her best insights about this collective endeavor we call American Studies.

**Attendance:** In a seminar, we can't manage without your daily participation, so you need to be in class every day we meet. If you experience illness or emergencies, email or phone me prior to class. Religious holidays are excused absences.

**Readings/Viewings:** These form a large part of the substance of our seminar (your research ideas provide the rest!). I have selected the readings and viewings to do one or more of four things: 1) showcase current scholarship in American studies, 2) provide some common ground for thinking about sustainability issues, 3) demonstrate some research methods, and 4) help you learn step by step how to make both library and online searching for sources more efficient and effective. The success (and everyone's enjoyment) of our discussions will depend on your willingness to complete the reading assignments on time and to contribute your insights about them. Please read actively, record your impressions, mark interesting or irritating passages; engage with the authors, and come to class ready to contribute at least one good comment and two good questions about their work and the issues they raise.

**Shaping Class Discussions:** To help build lively discussions, students will sign up to start discussion on each reading or viewing. When it is your turn, you should produce a handout that includes: 1) a quotation of the most striking sentence (or two) from the source, 2) your digest—in your own words--of what you think is the main idea or central question the scholar investigates in the item, 3) analysis of a passage that argues a point—how did the author make the argument? (sources, method, reasoning; this exercise works equally well with arguments you like or dislike), and 4) two questions to stimulate class discussion. I will model this technique on the second day of class. Handouts should not exceed one page. If this assignment seems confining in terms of

how you want to approach our discussion, make me a counteroffer.

**Blogs:** We will maintain two kinds of blogs in AMST 340 this semester. The first, a class blog on sustainability, will concentrate our ideas on how American Studies scholars can make sense of and think about, critique, or offer remedies regarding sustainability issues. In addition, each student will maintain a personal blog recording her or his ideas about the capstone project proposal as they develop. You will receive specific assignments for these and can expect to post 3-6 entries + additional comments for each blog over the course of the semester. The personal blog will also serve as a platform for peer feedback about your project as you work on it.

**Research Exercises and Worksheets:** There will be several short assignments over the course of the semester related to the Capstone Research Proposal. First and foremost, I will ask you to maintain a research log (see Elements of Library Research, 32-36) in which you record the steps you have taken in your library and online research, to be turned in by the final due date along with your formal proposal. Second will be a series of worksheets created to get you to practice skills exploring and using the library and the Web to find high quality sources on your topic. Third will be a very few tasks aimed at getting you to focus and refine your main research question(s) and/or methods. Try to be a good sport about these; they are an important part of the learn-by-doing design of the course.

**Meetings:** Each student will schedule three office hour meetings with the professor during the semester. These are posted on the class calendar and we will use class time to conduct them. These conferences will focus on your progress developing your capstone proposal. Prior to each meeting, you will be asked to complete research exercises which we can look at together to assess how your project is coming along and what issues you need help with.

**Peer Review and Feedback.** At various points in the semester, students will be asked to provide peer review and feedback about each others' projects. We will do this in a systematic way through the comment mechanism on everyone's personal blog as well as through one or two short assignments I provide in class or as homework. A proposal draft will be due just before Thanksgiving, and students will provide a formal critique of 2-3 proposals using a set of guidelines I will provide.

**Capstone Project Proposals/Presentations:** By the end of AMST 340, each student will produce a polished, formal research proposal for the Senior Capstone Project, to be completed in AMST 450, the Senior Seminar. The proposal will be organized into specific sections, according to a standard template. Blog posts, research exercises, conferences, and peer feedback will all be designed to help you develop and refine the components of your research proposal. At the end of the semester, each student will give a formal presentation of the proposal to the class for additional feedback and comment. Each presentation must include a visual and/or audio component using whatever software or app best suits your material: Powerpoint, Prezi, Camtasia, DVD clips, etc. Failure to proofread and spellcheck projects and presentations will cause the instructor to have apoplexy and that will, no doubt, have an adverse impact on your grades.

## **Course Readings and Viewings**

**There are two required texts available for purchase from the Book Center and Maryland Book Exchange. The rest of the readings will be posted on reserve on elms. The two films will be shown in class.**

**Mary W. George, The Elements of Library Research (Princeton, 2008), \$24.95 new**  
**John Caughey, Negotiating Cultures and Identities (Univ Nebraska Press, 2006), \$26.95 new, used online from \$2.66.**

## Grading

Grades will be calculated roughly as follows:

Class participation	15%
Research Exercises, Drafts, Conferences	20%
Blog Posts	15%
Peer Review and Feedback	10%
Final Presentation	10%
Final Research Proposal	30%

*Please note: Students will not be competing against each other for a limited number of good grades.*

## Additional Policies

Late work may receive a lower grade. It is the student's responsibility to get projects completed and posted or turned in in advance of the deadlines. Be sure to give yourself adequate time for solving technical problems and working around the occasional system crash. And, while we're on that subject, remember to save frequently and back up your work. Expect no mercy if you don't.

Code of Academic Integrity: All students enrolled in AMST 340 are expected to abide by the Student Honor Council's Code of Academic Integrity which can be found here: <http://www.shc.umd.edu/whatis.html>. Academic dishonesty (cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism) will not be tolerated. The definitions for these offenses are posted on the website just listed and we urge you to familiarize yourselves with them. "Academic dishonesty is a serious offense which may result in suspension or expulsion from the university."

Students with disabilities: Please identify yourselves early in the semester so that we can make appropriate arrangements through the Office of Disability Support Services.