

American Studies Methods
AMST 7100
Spring 2016
Tuesdays 6:30-9:15
English Building 250

Instructors:

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Course Description:

The methods course introduces students to current methods in American Studies research and public practice. The course focuses on core concepts, objects of analysis, and evolving research practices used for working in American Studies. In this class, students will grapple with the concept of interdisciplinarity, examine the values of a variety of disciplinary methods and think consciously about which methods make the most sense for their own particular areas of interest in American Studies. Students will read works emphasizing methods of historical research, visual culture analysis, ethnography, literary criticism and combinations of these methods. While critiquing these examples from the field, and working on their own research projects, students will also consider various professional contexts for “doing” American Studies, such as professional organizations and journals, classrooms, the workplace, public settings, and other diverse communities outside the university. Students will choose a general topic or subject for a research project at the beginning of the semester and research it using a variety of methodologies throughout the semester, producing a final project using at least two disciplinary methodologies.

Graduate Seminar Philosophy:

This is a graduate seminar requiring intensive reading and discussion. You should bring your readings with you to class and be prepared to discuss them. It is common for graduate seminars to be run largely by students themselves, who take responsibility for facilitating the seminar by turn during the semester. In this class, a significant amount of class time will be spent on student discussion of their own research projects using different disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. The class will not feature much lecture (if any) and I will consider the class to be successful when students are doing the majority of the talking. At times, it may feel to some of you as if the class is “floundering” or confused. However, despite whatever uncertainty or discomfort that you may experience, it is part of the process of learning, and is very typical in graduate education. If I intervene, it does not mean that I think things are going awry, but simply that I think my own knowledge of the particular subject would be useful to move the discussion forward.

It's likely that some of you will be more informed about one discipline than another, because you had different undergraduate majors. At some point, many of you may wish that you had more background in a given subject or disciplinary methodology or theory. There is no escape from this feeling, particularly in interdisciplinary scholarship. Because every academic work refers to some other set of previous works, there is no way to give you the necessary background in one semester. It's always a good idea to pursue background reading on your own, and if you feel it will help, that you share it with the class. Similarly, since many students in the class have taken other classes where they may have encountered some concepts or methods that are new to many students in the class, please make it a practice to share definitions of terms and concepts that you are using if you learned them outside this class.

Books: Available at the KSU bookstore

John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000

Bridget Brown, *They Know Us Better than We Know Ourselves: The History and Politics of Alien Abduction*, New York: New York University Press, 2007

Oneka LaBennett, *She's Mad Real: Popular Culture and West-Indian Girls in Brooklyn*, New York: NYU press 2013

Raymond Madden, *Being Ethnographic: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Ethnography*, Sage, 2010

Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010

Gretchen Murphy, *Shadowing the White Man's Burden: U.S. Imperialism and the Problem of the Color Line*, New York: New York University Press, 2010

Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 3rd edition Sage, 2011 (you can use the older, cheaper, second edition, but we'll just need to make sure you know which chapters to read since the two editions have slightly different chapter organization)

Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual For Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations, Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 8th edition 2013

Amy Wilkins, *Wannabes, Goths and Christians: The Boundaries of Sex, Style and Status* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008

Suggested Books:

Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd edition, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Required Articles on D2L Brightspace

Robin Bernstein, "Scriptive Things" from, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*, New York University Press, 2011

Paul Boyer, "Literary Criticism" from the *Oxford Companion to United States History*, New York, 2004

Hazel Carby, "All the Fire and Romance: The Magazine Fiction of Pauline Hopkins," from *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987

Eagleton, "Interpretation," from *How to Read Literature* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013

Tanya Erzen, "Introduction," *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversion in the Ex-Gay Movement*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003

Avery Gordon, "distractions" *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997

Richard P. Horwitz, "American Studies: Approaches and Concepts," from *The Online Encyclopedia of American Studies*, <http://www.theasa.net>

Robin D.G. Kelley, chapter one, *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original*, New York: The Free Press, 2010

Paul Lauter, "Reconfiguring Academic Disciplines: The Emergence of American Studies," *American Studies*, v.40, 2 n. 2 (1999) 23-38

Paula Rabinowitz, "Reading Rodney King" *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary*, London: Verso, 1994

David Samper, "Cannibalizing Kids: Rumor and Resistance in Latin America," *Journal of Folklore Research*, v. 39, n. 1 (Jan-Apr 2002), pp.1-32

Kathryn Schulz, "Our Minds, Part Three: Evidence," from *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error*, New York: Ecco, 2011.

Barry Shank, "The Continuing Embarrassment of Culture: From the Culture Concept to Cultural Studies" *American Studies*, v. 38, n 2 (1997) pp. 95-116

Priscilla Wald, "Imagined Immunities" from *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* Durham: Duke University Press, 2008

Requirements:

Class participation: 15% This is a seminar and it is essential that students drive the discussion. Come prepared to discuss the readings as well as your own research. Expect to contribute to class discussions. Absences and lateness will affect your grade.

Four short “building block” papers: 40% (10% each) During the semester, you will write three short papers and one “mini-block” (one or two pages) to “try out” different methods as you build toward your final paper. See the bottom of this syllabus for the complete detailed descriptions of each building block assignment. Rubrics for the building blocks are on D2L.

Reflective posts on D2L: 15 %

Each week, keep an online journal to share with the class through the KSU Desire 2 Learn (D2L) website. In this journal, you should reflect on the methodological implications of the reading that you are doing and discuss your own reactions to trying new methods for your own research topics. You may also respond to other people’s comments and reflections. D2L posts must be completed by 5:30 pm on the day that the class meets unless otherwise announced.

Final Paper: 30%

A research paper using at least two different disciplinary methods covered during the semester, including a section describing the methodology. 15 pp. minimum. See the end of the syllabus for the complete detailed description of this assignment.

University Policy Statements and Resources:

KSU’s Ethics Policy and Student Code of Conduct:

Students at KSU are responsible for reviewing the codes and procedures in the KSU Student Code of Conduct. <http://scai.kennesaw.edu/docs/KSU%20Codes%20of%20Conduct-2015.pdf>

KSU’s Statement on Academic Integrity:

Every KSU student is responsible for upholding the provisions of the Student Code of Conduct, as published in the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs. Section II of the Student Code of Conduct addresses the University’s policy on academic honesty, including provisions regarding plagiarism and cheating, unauthorized access to University materials, misrepresentation/falsification of University records or academic work, malicious removal, retention, or destruction of library materials, malicious/intentional misuse of computer facilities and/or services, and misuse of student identification cards. Incidents of alleged academic misconduct will be handled through the established procedures of the University Judiciary Program, which includes either an “informal” resolution by a faculty member, resulting in a grade adjustment, or a formal hearing procedure, which may subject a student to the Code of Conduct’s minimum one semester suspension requirement.

Statement on Plagiarism and cheating from the Kennesaw State Student Code of Conduct:

No student shall receive, attempt to receive, knowingly give or attempt to give unauthorized assistance in the preparation of any work required to be submitted for credit (including examinations, laboratory reports, essays, themes, term papers, etc.). Unless specifically authorized, the presence and/or use of electronic devices during an examination, quiz, or other class assignment is considered cheating. Engaging in any behavior which a professor prohibits as academic misconduct in the syllabus or in class discussion is cheating. When direct quotations are used, they should be indicated, and when the ideas, theories, data, figures, graphs, programs, electronic based information or illustrations of someone other than the student are incorporated into a paper or

used in a project, they should be duly acknowledged. No student may submit the same, or substantially the same, paper or other assignment for credit in more than one class without the prior permission of the current professor(s). All of the assignments for this course will be run through the plagiarism check, "turnitin.com" as part of the D2L learning platform.

Student Privacy and Federal Rules about disclosure of confidential student information (FERPA):

<http://enrollmentservices.kennesaw.edu/training/ferpa.php>

KSU's Student Rights Statement: Students of Kennesaw State University are entitled to an environment that is conducive to learning and individual growth. To this end, students enrolling at Kennesaw State University assume a responsibility to abide by the policies and regulations expressed in this section. By doing so, students may fulfill their responsibilities and enjoy the exercise of their own rights while also respecting the rights of others. See the link below for full

policy: <http://catalog.kennesaw.edu/content.php?catoid=27&navoid=2263>

KSU's Statement on Disruption of Campus Life:

It is the purpose of the institution to provide a campus environment which encourages academic accomplishment, personal growth, and a spirit of understanding and cooperation. An important part of maintaining such an environment is the commitment to protect the health and safety of every member of the campus community. Belligerent, abusive, profane, threatening and/or inappropriate behavior on the part of students is a violation of the Kennesaw State University Student Conduct Regulations. Students who are found guilty of such misconduct may be subject to immediate dismissal from the institution. In addition, these violations of state law may also be subject to criminal action beyond the University disciplinary process.

Link: <http://scai.kennesaw.edu/codes.php>

Statement on Sexual Misconduct:

Kennesaw State University is committed to providing programs, activities, and educational environment free from all forms of sex discrimination. KSU issues this statement of policy to inform the community of the University's comprehensive plan addressing sexual misconduct, educational programs, and procedures that address sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking, whether the incident occurs on or off campus. This policy generally covers faculty, students, and staff of the University, as well as third-parties.

Third parties include but are not limited to guests, vendors, contractors, retirees, and alumni. Link:

<http://scai.kennesaw.edu/procedures/sexual-misconduct.php>

Statement on Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

KSU provides program accessibility and reasonable accommodations for persons defined as disabled under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Disabled Student Support Services ADA Compliance Officer for Students, at [770-423-6443](tel:770-423-6443) (V) or [770-423-6480](tel:770-423-6480) (TDD). Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a letter of accommodation from the Office for Disabled Student Support Services. *Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments is requested to notify the instructor as early in the semester as possible. Verification from KSU disabled Student Support Services is*

required. All discussions will remain confidential For further information about the office of disability support services, see: http://www.kennesaw.edu/stu_dev/dsss/dsss.html

Please find the Desire2Learn Accessibility statement here <http://www.desire2learn.com/products/accessibility/>

Class Schedule:

Jan 12

Note from RH – on Reading for Methodology

Turabian, section 1.1, chapter 14

MA in American Studies Program Capstone Handbook

Richard P. Horwitz, “American Studies: Approaches and Concepts,” from *The Online Encyclopedia of American Studies*, <http://www.theasa.net>

Kathryn Schulz, “Our Minds, Part Three: Evidence,” from *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error*

William Appleman Williams, on book reviews

Writing: Journal on D2L

***** Basics of Historical Research *****

Jan 19 :

Reading:

John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, chapters 1 and 2

Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill*, Appendix 1 + pp. xi—107 (including footnotes)

Turabian, chapter 3 and sections 1.2-2.1.4

Writing: Journal on D2L

Be prepared to talk about footnotes in detail

Jan 26

Reading:

Arnold, *History* chapters 3 + 4

Miles, *House*, p. 109—197

Robin D.G. Kelley, chapter 1, from *Thelonious Monk* (including footnotes)

Again be prepared to talk about footnotes

Turabian section 7.7 ; chapter 4 (on note-taking)

Writing: Journal on D2L

Feb 2

Reading: Arnold, *History* Chapter 5-7

Turabian, chapter 12

KSU writing center, handout on literature reviews

Writing: *Building Block 1 is due*

Journal on D2L

*****Ethnography*****

Feb 9

Reading:

Madden, Section One (pp. 1-55)

LaBennett, chapter 1

Wilkins, Introduction– chapter 3

Writing : D2L

Feb 16

Reading:

Madden, Section Two (pp. 59-113)

LaBennett, chapter 2-3

Wilkins, chapters, 4-5

Erzen, “Introduction”

Writing:

Do the online Citi Certification course by today

First set of field notes (post on D2L and bring to class)

& Journal on D2L

Feb 23

Reading:

Madden, chapters 7-9 (51)

LaBennett, chapter 4-end

Wilkins, chapters 6-8

Writing: 2nd set of field notes (post on D2L and bring to class)

Journal on D2L

March 1

journal on D2L

Building Block Two is due

****** Visual Culture ******

March 8

Reading:

Gillian Rose, *Visual Culture Methodologies* chapters 1, 2, 4 & 6

Paula Rabinowitz, “Reading Rodney King”

- *Historical Research Update Today*

Writing: Journal on D2L

March 15

Reading:

Gillian Rose, *Visual Culture Methodologies* chapters 5, 7 and 8

Robin Bernstein, "Scriptive Things" from *Racial Innocence*

Writing: Journal on D2L

Building Block Three: "Mini-block" Due: Use two different techniques from the Rose book to interpret at least two images related to your research subject ("the Good Eye" *cannot* be one of the techniques)

***** Literary Analysis ********March 22**

Reading:

Eagleton, "Interpretation"

Paul Boyer, "Literary Criticism" from the *Oxford Companion to American History*

Murphy, *Shadowing*, pp. 1-77

Dixon, excerpt *The Leopard's Spots*

Ruiz-Velasco, "Order Our of Chaos"

Writing: Journal on D2L

March 29

Reading:

Murphy, pp. 79-146, 223-227

Hopkins, excerpt, *Of One Blood*

Carby, "All the Fire and Romance"

Turabian chapter 9

Writing: Journal on D2L

April 5: No Class! Spring Break

***** Interdisciplinarity: How To Mix it Up*******April 12**

Reading:

Bridget Brown, *They Know Us Better* pp. 1-99

Priscilla Wald, "Imagined Immunities"

Writing: Journal on D2L

Building Block Four is due today

April 19

Reading:

Brown, *They Know Us Better*, 100-209

Samper, "Cannibalizing Kids"
Turabian, chapter 7
Writing journal on D2L

April 26

Reading: Your own research materials
Avery Gordon, "distractions" from *Ghostly Matters*
Paul Lauter, "Reconfiguring Academic Disciplines"
Barry Shank, "The Continuing Embarrassment of Culture"
Rough Draft Due
Draft workshop

Final Papers Due: Friday May 6th

**** Detailed Descriptions of the Building Block Assignments and Final Paper:**

Building Block One: Historical Research: Due Feb 2nd

The first assignment is to do the early stage of historical research: reviewing secondary literature on your subject, figuring out existing historical debates, locating primary sources, and identifying possible new research questions that the secondary literature does not answer.

1. The subject of research must be at least 20 years in the past. For reasons of "trying on" this method and learning about the more distant past related to your subject, your historical research cannot be a "history of the present."
2. Identify 3 *significant* scholarly sources on your topic (go broader to a larger category if your specific topic does not have sources): 1 recent book + 2 recent articles. (We will discuss how to identify important/significant recent works in class)
3. Find 2 print-based primary source documents related to your topic (this may be digitized, but should have started as printed documents). You may NOT use oral history done by you OR films, images, poetry, music or literature as a primary source. This restriction is related to course learning objectives A) learn how to read sources that are not intended to answer your questions (thus, no interviews) B) learn about the more distant past (so interview subjects are dead) and C) learn how to use the most common historical sources – and we will use images and narrative sources in other sections of the course.
4. Use citation method found in Turabian (The Chicago Manual of Style)

The final product of this assignment will be a mini-literature review and proposal for further research.

In the first section, summarize your three secondary sources identifying their 1) main argument 2) best big idea 3) best evidence 4) biggest flaw or gap.

In the next section, identify common themes or topics addressed in this recent research on your subject, as well as at least one debate among historians about your subject.

In the third section, write the possible historical research questions that you might ask that these sources do not answer, explaining why you think your questions are significant for historical scholarship. Identify what you think might be difficult about answering these questions.

Identify and describe your two primary sources and how they might answer your questions.

Write an additional bibliography identifying further secondary and primary sources that you will consult on your topic.

2. Building Block 2: Ethnographic Research - Due March 1st

Because it would be impossible to do a real ethnographic project in such a short period of time, this project will not include a paper or ethnographic research on your subject. For this building block, you'll be doing field notes to practice observational skills AND a grant proposal for an ethnographic "fantasy project" including an IRB application (which you will *not* turn in to the IRB). All the components of the ethnographic project are described below:

- 1.** Take at least three separate days' worth of field notes entries in public places for the purpose of practicing ethnographic observation and writing methods. (these field notes entries are due in increments and appear on your course schedule) These are for practice purposes only and are not part of the fantasy project. In a real ethnographic project, you would interact with subjects. In these observational style notes, you cannot interact with subjects because doing so is forbidden by IRB rules.
- 2.** Find at least one ethnographic secondary source about your topic or a closely related topic. That is, if you are writing about contemporary Ham radio operators, your closest ethnography might be an ethnographic study of CB-radio using community in the 1970s.
- 2.** Write a detailed ethnographic "fantasy project" proposal in the format of the grant application requirements listed below.

I Project Title

II Project Abstract (800 characters max)

III Project Description to include

A. Objectives, including a statement of the research question

B. Detailed method of research including time to be spent on the project, specific locations, and justification of the method in connection with the objectives. The research method described must be ethnographic. (See note below.)

C. Significance of this project for humanities and social science research, keeping free of discipline-specific jargon. Explain how your project will contribute to existing scholarship on this subject, including a mention of your secondary source.

In your grant application you will need to:

1. Define an ethnographic research question *as if* you had extensive time to pursue a full ethnographic research project in the future (part of both IRB application and fantasy project proposal)
2. Suggest a theoretical framework or problem that you might explore based on your reading of ethnographic sources in this class.
3. Identify and explain the justification for the choice of group or setting in which you would do this fantasy ethnography in your subject area
- 3. Write an IRB application for your fantasy project:**

Fill out an application for IRB approval to work with human subjects *as if* you were going to complete the research for this grant proposal, including any interview questions that you would plan to ask and considering any ethical issues that you may encounter. The purpose of this assignment is to explore ethical questions in ethnography, think about how to write good interview questions, and to practice writing an IRB application.

- 4. Write a paragraph on D2L in which you reflect on how an ethnographic component might change the existing project that you are doing.**

* If, as you think about your research question, you decide that you want to do any form of human subjects research for your final paper for this class, you will need to fill out an actual IRB application and follow all steps for submitting it to the IRB and get their approval before you can begin doing that research. You should keep this real application separate from the “fantasy proposal” to be turned in for building block three.

NOTES:

The goal in this particular building block is for you to demonstrate your understanding of ethnography as a research method by designing an imaginary ethnographic research project. Use the models that we read in class, your new secondary source, and the Madden textbook as your guides.

There is room for confusion with this assignment for a number of reasons, so please follow the above guidelines and use the assigned readings as models for your fantasy project’s proposed methodology and time-line. During this section of the course, some of you may decide that you want to do human subjects research and fill out an actual IRB application as part of your project for this class. There are many forms of human subject research that are not ethnography (such as oral history and other kinds of interviews, or survey research) and you are welcome to use these research methods in your final paper for this class if they make sense for your research questions. However, *even if all ethnography requires interaction with human subjects, not all human subject research fits the description of ethnography.*

In order to succeed in the building block assignment, your fantasy project description should be an ethnographic research project that you would imagine doing in the future. Please do not design your fantasy project with the goal of being exempt from IRB review, or even according to what will work best for your research project within the time-frame of this class, but with the goal of describing what a fully

ethnographic research project on your subject would look like if you had as much time as you needed, thus demonstrating your understanding of ethnographic research methods and enabling you to pursue these methods in the future.

3. Research on visual culture: Mini-Block Due March 15th

Use two different techniques from the Rose book to interpret at least two images related to your research subject. These analyses should be about 350 words each. The compositional analysis, which Rose calls “the Good Eye” *cannot* be one of the techniques, although you can draw from basic elements of compositional analysis in the process of using any other technique in the book.

4. Literary Analysis – April 12th

Choose a literary text, whether it is a short story, poem or novel. Write a 5 page paper about that literary source using any “cultural studies” approach to literature and the MLA citation format.

Identify at least one secondary scholarly source that analyzes your narrative text or a very similar one. For example, if you are writing about Meg Wolitzer’s *The Interestings*, and cannot find a scholarly article about it, pick another academic article about contemporary American literary fiction.

Reflect on why you gravitated towards this particular type of criticism. You may draw from Murphy, Gilman, Carby for an interpretive frame or “theory” to apply, or choose another critical or theoretical source. I recommend reading Terry Eagleton’s book, *Literary Theory*, if you did not take an advanced level English class when you were an undergraduate.

5. Final Paper: Due May 6th

Using at least two different disciplinary methods that you practiced during the semester (history and literature/ ethnography and history/ visual culture and ethnography, etc) write a 15- 20 page paper based on your research of your topic. This paper should be focused on a workable research question, include a clear thesis, evidence to support it, and an explanation of your interdisciplinary methodology that is informed by cultural studies concepts discussed during the semester. This paper should not be a pastiche of your building blocks, but it *may* incorporate sections, evidence, or ideas from your building block papers. The depth of research and analysis should move significantly beyond the contents of the building block drafts.