

American Studies 374
Senior Seminar

Pfitzer
Fall 2007

American Studies 374 (Senior Seminar) is the culminating or "capstone" experience in the American Studies major. It builds on the concepts and strategies learned in American Studies 221: Methods and Approaches as well as on the many other courses in the American Studies curriculum. The seminar is designed to help students find academic meaning and focus in the work they have already completed at Skidmore and to provide a bridge to the world beyond college by requiring them to confront squarely that nagging question: "What will I do with my American Studies degree when I graduate?" These goals will be accomplished primarily through the writing of a major research paper whose topic and scope will be determined by the prior academic preparation and future personal objectives of the students enrolled in the seminar.

In writing this major research paper students will be asked to develop or sharpen various skills, including: how to locate primary and secondary sources; how to generate reliable and useful bibliographies; how to evaluate historical evidence; how to frame historical questions; how to construct historical arguments; and how to cultivate a narrative style. To help with these considerable tasks, we will follow a seminar or "workshop" format. The first several weeks of the course will be given over to individual exercises in selecting appropriate research topics and locating relevant historical materials. In each of the remaining weeks selected students will present research to the seminar at least three times--once in the form of a prospectus; a second time in a more detailed rough draft format; and a third instance in a more formalized manner. These "works-in-progress" reports then will be evaluated by classmates using a peer critiquing system and an electronic mail account established expressly for American Studies 374. Small study groups will be created at the beginning of the term, and evaluation teams will be assigned for the purposes of critiquing the formal presentations. From time to time there will be various formal class exercises and readings, but in general the format for the seminar will be informal and based on discussions of the seminar papers. If these procedures work effectively, students should then have a steady source of verbal and written feedback as they draft and redraft their projects. AM 374 is a collaborative enterprise, and the final grade in the seminar will be a combination of work completed successfully on one's own paper and on behalf of other papers produced in the workshop. Students also will be asked to keep a writing journal which will be consulted throughout the term. In addition, each student will need to identify one faculty member (in any department) to serve as a consultant on the project throughout the term.

A select number of students may be invited to expand their seminar papers into Honors projects in the Spring Term. In order to pursue an honors project, students must make separate application to the department for approval following the completion of the term. The seminar paper for American Studies 374 will be the most important component in the department's evaluation process.

Grades will be apportioned as follows:

Seminar Presentations (Prospectus, Thesis, and Formal)	30%
Peer Critiques, E-mail, Writing Journal	20%
Class Participation	10%
Final Research Paper	40%

Students should purchase Mary Lynn Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing History and David Hackett Fischer, Historians' Fallacies from the Skidmore Shop.

Unit I: Historical Investigation--Developing a Topic

Wednesday

September 5 -- Introduction: The Workshop Format and the American Studies Curriculum

Class Exercise: American Studies Student Program Review & Choosing a Topic

Reading: Steffens and Dickerson, "The Writer's Guide to History," (xerox);

*** * * Topic Proposal due Monday, September 10**

Monday

September 10 -- Going to the Sources: Library and Archival Materials

Class Exercise: "So I Think I Have a Topic; Now What?" Visit to the Special Collections, Pohndorff Room, Lucy Scribner Archives

Reading: Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing History pp.1-19.

Wednesday

September 12 -- Going on Line: Using Internet Resources

Class Exercise: "To Use or Not to Use: That Is the Question" (Meet in the Bibliographic Room of the Library)

Reading: The American Memory Project <http://lcweb.loc.gov>. The American Studies Crossroads Project <http://www.georgetown.edu/crossroads>

*** * * Topic Revision and Bibliography due Monday, September 17**

*** * * Short Presentation Conferences with Pfitzer/Writer's Journal due**

Monday

September 17 -- Prospectus Presentations (#1 - #3)

Reading: Topic Proposals

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writer's Journal

Wednesday

September 19 -- Prospectus Presentations (#4 - #6)

Reading: Topic Proposals

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writer's Journal

Monday

September 24 -- Prospectus Presentations (#7 - #9)

Reading: Topic Proposals

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writer's Journal

Wednesday

September 26 - Prospectus Presentations (#10 - #12)

Reading: Topic Proposals

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writer's Journal

Unit II: Historical Explanation: Creating a Thesis

Monday

October 1 -- How Do I Develop a Thesis?: Asking Questions of Sources

Class Exercise: The Historian as Detective: Generating a Thesis from Historical Documents

Reading: Davidson and Lytle, "The Strange Death of Silas Deane," (xerox).

Wednesday

October 3 - The Contested Past: Choosing Among Competing Interpretations

Class Exercise: Argument/Counter-Argument: In Support of a Thesis

Reading: Selected Historical Documents (xeroxes); Fischer, "Fallacies of Generalization," Historians' Fallacies 103-130.

*** * * Thesis Statement/Argument Outline due, Monday, October 8**

*** * * Thesis Presentation Conferences with Pfitzer/Writer's Journal due**

Monday

October 8 -- Thesis Presentations (#1-#3)

Reading: Paper drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Rough Draft Assignments

Wednesday

October 10 -- Thesis Draft Presentations (#4-#6)

Reading: Paper drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Rough Draft Assignments

Monday

October 15 -- Thesis Presentations (#7-#9)

Reading: Paper drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Rough Draft Assignments

Wednesday

October 17 -- Thesis Presentations (#10-#12)

Reading: Paper drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Rough Draft Assignments

Unit III: Literary Presentation: Writing the Formal Paper

Monday

October 22 - Narrating History: The Literary Art of Telling the Past

Class Exercise: Creating Narrative Maps

Reading: Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing History 23-29; Herbert Butterfield, "The Whig Interpretation of History," (xerox).

Wednesday

October 24 - Literary Form and the Logic of History

Class Exercise: Interpreting Historical Documents

Reading: Fischer, "Fallacies of Narration," Historians' Fallacies 131-163.

*** * * Narrative Maps Due, Monday, October 29**

*** * * Formal Presentation Conferences with Pfitzer/Writer's Journal due**

Monday

October 29 - Formal Presentations (#1-#3)

Reading: Paper Drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writing formal drafts

Wednesday

October 31 -- Formal Presentations (#4-#6)

Reading: Paper Drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writing formal drafts

Monday

November 5 -- Formal Presentations (#7-#9)

Reading: Paper Drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writing formal drafts

Wednesday
November 7 -- Formal Presentations (#10-#12)

Reading: Paper Drafts
Writing: Peer Critiques; Writing formal drafts

Unit IV: Scholarly Form: The Rough Draft

Monday
November 12 -- Editorial Guidelines for Constructing the Rough Draft

Reading: Fischer, "Fallacies of Composition," Historians' Fallacies 216-242.

Wednesday
November 14 -- Formatting and Editorial Workshop

Reading: Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing History pp. 57-97.

Monday
November 19 -- Roundtable: Project Assessments

*** * * Rough Draft of Final Paper Due, Monday November 19**

Wednesday
November 22 -- Thanksgiving Break

Unit V: Works-in-Progress: Toward the Final Draft

Monday
November 26 - Rough Drafts Returned/Pep Talk

Wednesday
November 28 - Individual Conferences with Pfitzer/Team Meeting

Monday
December 3 -- Individual Conferences with Pfitzer

Wednesday
December 5 -- Individual Conferences with Pfitzer/Team Meeting

Monday
December 10 - Final Editing Sessions

Wednesday
December 12 -- Seminar Roundtable: So What Can I Do With This Paper Anyway?

*** * * Final Paper Due in class on Wednesday, December 12**