

Themes in American Culture: Diversity in the United States

AM 260J (3 credits)

Spring 2011 – Tisch Learning Center 303



COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine the ways in which people in the United States attempt to reconcile the realities of cultural difference with preconceived notions of a unified US and a singular "American" identity. Students will learn about the United States as a complex, heterogeneous society that has been shaped profoundly by both the connections and conflicts implicit in its multicultural heritage. Together we will also address the interrelationships and tensions that characterize a culturally and socioeconomically diverse society by examining social movements spurred by categories of identity such as race, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, nationality and class. This course places a broad emphasis on the vast range of differences and similarities among American cultures as well as the individual differences that constitute who we are as citizens, students, consumers, athletes and friends, etc. In fact, we cannot understand larger cultural phenomenon without examining how US institutions and society have constructed individual differences in the past and present. Using life history and ethnographic methods, we will examine markers of identity meaningful in US cultures and work to understand the intersectional nature of these social positions as they relate to each other, our nation and ourselves.

A cornerstone of this dialogue is that it will take place within the context of a safe intellectual space for all students that allows for development of critical thinking skills, close interrogation of texts, and posing difficult questions. On a side note—this course will be rigorous but rewarding. Together, we will learn to exercise both our creativity and our intellect in order to understand, analyze, and appreciate diversity in the United States.