

SPRING 2020

AMERICAN STUDIES COURSE OFFERINGS

AM 101W 001 A Humorous (Dis)Course

T/R 3:40-5:30 Beck Krefting, 4 credits

In this course we will use stand-up comedy to think critically about American culture and to explore key moments and transitions in American history. As burgeoning Americanists, we will examine the history of stand-up comedy as the history of the United States—that comedy reflects the institutions and ideologies shaping cultural production; the same institutions and ideologies that prompt us to warfare, that determine who has rights and who does not and that influence our consumptive practices. This course will examine the history of cultural production in America, specifically through the cultural form of stand-up comedy/comic performance and how it has been influenced and shaped by shifts in social consciousness, changing economy, industrial and technological innovations, political events, public/popular discourses and global conflict and relations.

AM 101W 002 Cultural Geographies

TR 9:10-11:00 Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas 4 credits

What is American “culture”? Is American “culture” a thing, an idea, a set of practices, or a myth? Does American culture unite or divide us? Is American culture connected to certain people or places, or is it mobile? How does it impact the ways people perceive themselves in relation to others, locally and globally? What about all of these questions is geographic, and does thinking about American culture geographically give us a different understanding of the term? For instance, is culture an important concept to how we perceive collective values and live in relation to others around us? AM 101 is designed to address these and other questions about something called American “culture.” To do so, it will introduce students to the interdisciplinary study of American cultural identity and the ways that a geographic approach helps us make sense of the cultural practices that shapes the places in which we live, and the people believed to occupy them. In AM 101, students will examine how questions of American culture are always already questions of geography, identity, history, and belonging, and how a geographic approach to such questions helps us understand the contemporary world in more critical ways.

AM 221 Methods and Approaches

WF 8:40-10:30 Gregory Pfitzer, 4 credits

An introduction to American studies scholarship, methodologies, and approaches to the study of society and culture in the United States. Course materials include “classics” in American studies as well as the most recent scholarship: the “myth and symbol” school, the culture concept, psychoanalytic methodologies, new literary and feminist critiques, material culture and oral history resources, mass and popular culture analyses, with attention to issues of race, gender,

class, and ethnicity throughout. The intent of the course is to offer students a variety of opportunities to sharpen their analytical, research, and writing skills from interdisciplinary and historiographic perspectives.

AM 261C 001 Gaming, American Society and Culture

T/R 2:10-3:30 Aaron Pedinotti, 3 credits

This course explores the multivalent significance of gaming to American society, and examines the many ways in which diverse forms of gamic praxis have been represented in American culture. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to these topics, it presents gaming as a set of socio-cultural practices with profound resonance and effects in American life. Culturally oriented units of the course focus on representations of gaming in films, television shows, literary novels, genre fiction, and in games themselves. Other units focus on the intertwinement of gaming with broader social, political, and economic issues. These include questions of ethnic, racial, and gender diversity in games; the emergence of game industries as economic rivals to Hollywood; the relationship of these industries and their practices to America's place in the global economy; the historical roles of game theory in US military planning and diplomacy; the increasing influence of online game communities and fan cultures in mainstream US society; debates and moral panics over violence in games; and the potential role of games as educational and persuasive technologies. Game genres studied in the course include console and arcade-style videogames, war and strategy games, tabletop and massive multiplayer online RPGS, collectible card games, and games accessed through augmented and virtual reality platforms. Readings include fiction, theoretical texts, game studies literature, and cultural and ethnographic writings on American gaming. Evaluation is based on reading responses, participation, and papers. Some experiential engagement with gaming is also a part of the curriculum.

AM 261D 001 Critical Museum Studies

WF 12:20-2:10, Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas 4 credits

What do material objects and cultural relics tell us about individual and collective experiences, past and present? How do people and cultures assemble, preserve, and display objects of cultural significance to form narratives of cultural identity and history, and who or what determines what is "culturally significant"? To answer these and other questions, this course will provide students with an understanding of the material and discursive practices of museums, memorials, and archives in constructing narratives of cultural history and identity. Focusing on the curatorial processes of material objects and the discourses they shape, produce, and manage about American identity, history, and culture, this course blends hands-on and theoretical approaches and provides students with knowledge of Critical Museum Studies in 20th and 21st century America.

AM 351C 001 Sexuality and Space

T 6:00-9:00, Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas, 3 credits

How has the city come to signify much of LGBT life in the 20th and 21st centuries? How are prevailing attitudes about sexuality (heterosexual and homosexual) expressed and codified within urban spaces and places? While interdisciplinary studies of sexuality have recently shifted to incorporate rural landscapes and other non-urban environments, much of the urban landscape has yet to be accounted for, particularly with regard to difference. In order to account for such difference, we must critically engage the urban environment and the ways it continues to normalize certain spaces and sexual identities—including gay and lesbian—within the city's landscape.

AM 351C 002 American Science Fiction

W 6:00-9:00 Aaron Pedinotti, credits 3

This course takes a multi-medial, socio-historically focused, and intersectional approach to the study of American science fiction. Tracing the genre's history from its nineteenth century origins to today, the course surveys novels, short stories, television shows, and films from numerous sub-genres of American SF. While doing so, it explores the diverse ways that such texts have refracted major issues in American society and culture and examines science fictional representations of diverse social identities. Writers studied in the course include Edgar Allen Poe, Edward Paige Mitchell, Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Joanna Russ, Octavia Butler, Kim Stanley Robinson, Margaret Atwood, William Gibson, Paulo Baciagalupi and N.K. Jemison. Television screenings will sample classic episodes of major American sci-fi programs such as *The Twilight Zone*, *Star Trek* (in multiple generations), the previous decade's reboot of *Battlestar Galactica*, and contemporary series such as *Undone*, *Maniac*, and *The Expanse*. Cinematic screenings will include classic and contemporary science fiction films such as *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Blade Runner*, *Ex Machina*, and *Upstream Color*. For students who are interested in interactive digital narratives, assignments will offer options for independent research into science fiction videogames and VR stories. Subgenres of science fiction to be studied include space opera, cyberpunk, steampunk, military SF, cli-fi, Afrofuturism, and dystopian and utopian fiction. Throughout the course, several socio-political, historical, technological, and ecological themes will be addressed. These include representations of race, gender, sexual identity, and social class in science fictional texts; refractions of twentieth and twenty-first anxieties about the impact of such technologies as nuclear weapons, genetic engineering and artificial intelligence; future-oriented speculations about the fate of American representative democracy in the face of new social and technological developments; pessimistic and optimistic takes on the looming possibility of ecological collapse; and the perceived promises and dangers posed by posthumanism, transhumanism, the singularity, collective intelligence and hive minds. As each of these themes and topics are explored, students will be encouraged to conceive of science fiction as a genre that concerns the present as much as the future, and to approach the many worlds that we will visit with equal degrees of critical consciousness, caution, and wonder.

AM 356 Sports Cinema

WF 12:20-1:40 Jeffrey Segrave, 4 credits

S 6:30-9:30

This class puts in context and critiques feature films and documentaries about sports to understand and appreciate—aesthetically, historically, culturally—a wide variety of experiences and issues. The course is also intended to enhance visual literacy, and thus students will assess the films *as films*, which have their own codes and conventions. As one would expect, most of the films we will study were made and set in the United States. A notable exception is Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (1938), which chronicles and celebrates the 1936 Berlin Olympic games. We will screen several “classic” sport films—among them, *Knute Rockne—All American* (1940), *Raging Bull* (1980), and *Hoop Dreams* (1994). After spring break, we will pair a Hollywood feature film with a related documentary: so, for example, Ken Carlson's *Go Tigers!* (2001), which is about high school football in Massillon, Ohio, will be paired with Peter Berg's *Friday Night Lights* (2004). The point is *not* to suggest that documentaries provide a more accurate version of sporting reality; rather, it is to consider what different kinds of visual texts, grammars, and discourses do well (and poorly) and how they interact with and enhance one another. Students are required to attend a weekly evening film screening.

AM 368 The 1960s

M/W 4:00-5:50 Gregory Pfitzer, 4 credit

A consideration of the major events of the 1960s, including the New Frontier, the Cuban missile crisis, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the war in Vietnam, the civil rights movement, the sexual and gender revolutions, the rise of rock and roll, the counterculture, the moon landing and other landmarks of the decade. The course considers not only what happened during those climactic years, but why such events were so important to American development, and how perceptions about the 1960s have changed over time.