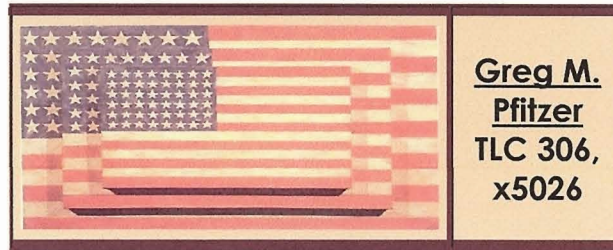


skidmore college's
AMERICAN STUDIES
department am 374

senior seminar

FALL 2008
MW, 4:00-5:30
LIB 213



Exploration of primary and secondary sources in the interdisciplinary examination of a particular topic in American culture. Students will pursue a major research project or prepare an honors thesis proposal. Required of all senior majors. Open to majors only; normally taken in fall term of senior year.

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 group exercises in selecting appropriate research topics and locating relevant historical materials. In each of the remaining weeks selected students will present their findings 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 time in a formalized short draft. 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 have a steady source of verbal and written feedback as they draft and redraft their projects. 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 and Discussion Forum	20%
Class Participation and Writing Journal	10%
Final Research Paper	40%

Notice that 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 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 3 -- 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 8**

Monday

September 8 -- 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 10 -- 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 15**

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

Monday

September 15 -- Prospectus Presentations (#1 - #2)

Reading: Topic Proposals

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writer's Journal

Wednesday
September 17 -- Prospectus Presentations (#3 - #4)

Reading: Topic Proposals
Writing: Peer Critiques; Writer's Journal

Monday
September 22 -- Prospectus Presentations (#5 - #6)

Reading: Topic Proposals
Writing: Peer Critiques; Writer's Journal

Wednesday
September 24 -- Prospectus Presentations (#7 - #8)

Reading: Topic Proposals
Writing: Peer Critiques; Writer's Journal

Unit II: Historical Explanation: Creating a Thesis

Monday
September 29 -- 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 1 — 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 6**

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

Monday

October 6 -- Thesis Presentations (#1-#2)

Reading: Paper drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Rough Draft Assignments

Wednesday

October 12 -- Thesis Presentations (#3-#4)

Reading: Paper drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Rough Draft Assignments

Monday

October 13 -- Thesis Presentations (#5-#6)

Reading: Paper drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Rough Draft Assignments

Wednesday

October 15 -- Thesis Presentations (#7-#8)

Reading: Paper drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Rough Draft Assignments

Note: We may need to reschedule this session

Unit III: Literary Presentation: Writing the Formal Paper

Monday

October 20 -- 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 22 -- 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 27**

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

Monday

October 27 -- Formal Presentations (#1-#2)

Reading: Paper Drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writing formal drafts

Wednesday

October 29 -- Formal Presentations (#3-#4)

Reading: Paper Drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writing formal drafts

Monday

November 3 -- Formal Presentations (#5-#6)

Reading: Paper Drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writing formal drafts

Wednesday

November 5 -- Formal Presentations (#7-#8)

Reading: Paper Drafts

Writing: Peer Critiques; Writing formal drafts

Unit IV: Scholarly Form: The Rough Draft

Monday

November 10 -- Editorial Guidelines for Constructing the Rough Draft

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

Wednesday

November 12 -- Formatting and Editorial Workshop

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

Monday

November 17 – Team Meetings with Pfitzer/ Rough Draft Writing/Writer's Journal

Wednesday

November 19 – Team Meetings with Pfitzer/Rough Draft Writing/Writer's Journal

Monday

November 24 -- Roundtable: Project Assessments

**** Rough Draft of Final Paper Due, Monday November 24**

Wednesday

November 26 -- Thanksgiving Break

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

Monday

December 1 – Rough Drafts Returned/Pep Talk

Wednesday

December 3 – Individual Conferences with Pfitzer/Last Team Meeting

Monday

December 8 -- Individual Conferences with Pfitzer

Wednesday

December 10 -- Seminar Roundtable: So What Can I Do With This Paper Anyway?

***** Final Paper Due in class on Wednesday, December 10**