American Culture Studies

The Master of Arts in American Culture Studies addresses the intellectual and moral questions of American identity and belonging that no single disciplinary perspective can comprehensively and satisfyingly resolve. What does it mean to live and work in an American culture devoted to individual success and autonomy and at the same time be a citizen of a nation devoted to collective needs and well-being?

The Master of Arts in American Culture Studies provides the instruction, both in specific disciplines and in cross-disciplinary conversations, to help students answer important questions about American society. It also introduces some of the social, political and cultural issues that have shaped American culture and identity. Most fundamentally, it provides a critical skill set that fosters the analysis of an array of cultural objects — a place, an event, a work of art, a political institution — from a rich and diverse foundation of knowledge and perspectives.

Students' studies culminate in a self-directed project that allows them to explore an area of personal interest while participating in a multidisciplinary scholarly community. Part of the excitement of this kind of learning is the opportunity to engage in creative, rigorous exchange with faculty in the humanities and social sciences at Washington University in St. Louis as well as with leading practitioners in the St. Louis professional and policy world.

Studies may span American literature, history, politics, religion, philosophy, art, music and film.

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Degree Requirements

Master of Arts in American Culture Studies

Courses in American Culture Studies generally cover material from a range of disciplinary fields and areas. The category of a particular course is determined by the discipline that is most heavily weighted in the class and/or by the nature of the core questions around which the course revolves. The distribution of each home-based course will be noted in its description.

The Master of Arts in American Culture Studies is a 30-unit program.

Required Courses: 18 units

Choose 6 units from each of the following distribution areas:

- Humanities courses from literature, history, religion or philosophy
- Social Sciences courses from anthropology, education, economics or political science
- Arts courses from music, art history or theater/film

Electives: 6-9 units

The course AMCS 445 Introduction to American Culture Studies is recommended for all students. Remaining electives are drawn from course work in different aspects of American culture.

Students may, with permission, count up to 9 to 12 units of graduate-level courses from related departments toward their degree.

Final Written Project: 3-6 units

All students are required to complete a final written project. This project is normally completed during the final semester of the program (or, in some cases, the final year), and it entails substantial research into and analysis of a topic determined by the student in consultation with the program coordinator.

Courses

The courses listed below are representative samples of past offerings in American Culture Studies. Visit the online course listings to view current semester offerings for U89 AMCS (https://courses.wustl.edu/CourseInfo.aspx?sch=U&dept=U89&crslvl=4:8).

U89 AMCS 4101 History of American Journalism
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 412 Sports and Culture: Reading Race and Racism Through Spectator Sports
This course will examine the role of spectator sports in American life, seeking to understand the way athletics have influenced the politics and discourse of the United States and its citizens. In particular, we will consider the prominent role sports have played in affecting the way Americans understand race and racism. We will focus on athletes of significance since the Civil War, including Isaac Burns Murphy, Jack Johnson, Jesse Owens, Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan, and others. At the same time, we will examine how media shapes our understanding of athletes and the competitions we consume. Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH, ACS

U89 AMCS 413 Writing the Documentary Lyric
This course explores American culture through poetic accounts that focus on the personal experience of social issues ranging from ecological crisis, consumer culture, race, labor, war, and autobiography as coextensive with local history. Students will blend research with creative writing, reading exemplary texts (such as Birdlovers, Backyard; Giscombe Road; Citizen; Port of Los Angeles; Shut Up, Shut Down; and 100 Notes on Violence) while producing their own creative work. The readings and writings will be focused on documentary writing.
which incorporates quotations from daily life, the news, films, diaries, public documents, and maps. The readings studied are "lyric" instead of journalistic, following a poetic approach that connects inner experience and outer event, intimate and distant occurrences, people and places, private and public life. Students will engage in weekly creative-writing exercises while developing a final research-based creative-writing project. The course will include conversations with some of our books' authors, who will offer insights into their processes of cultural research grounded in personal experience and language-conscious cultural critique. This course will count toward the major in American culture studies for day students. This course fulfills the Art distribution requirement for the AMCS MA program.

Credit 3 units. UColl: ACF

U89 AMCS 4151 Nonfiction: Reading and Writing the Memoir
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 420 The History of American Architecture
This course examines the ideological, political, economic, and social determinants that have shaped the look of American architecture. Throughout readings that will include a survey text in addition to topical works covering the social history of housing, the vernacular architecture of Las Vegas and the rise (and fall, and rise) of Frank Lloyd Wright, students will learn the definitive characteristics of American architecture. A central point of study will be examining contradictory tendencies in the American practice of architecture: the embrace of exceptionalism through modern forms and styles representing a new national identity, occurring alongside the emulation of classical and European precedents to legitimate a new nation's buildings. The readings will illuminate how the characteristics of American architecture reveal the social, economic and political structures of its production. Ultimately, students will be able to read an American building to discern evidence of national identity, individual political agency, the evolution of gender roles, the assertion of disciplinary and economic power, and the evolution of the American artistic sensibility. This course will count toward major in American Culture Studies for day students. This course fulfills the Humanities distribution requirement for the AMCS MA program. It also counts toward the MD and some concentration area requirements for the AMCS MA program. Students will be able to read an American building to discern evidence of national identity, individual political agency, the evolution of gender roles, the assertion of disciplinary and economic power, and the evolution of the American artistic sensibility. This course will count toward major in American Culture Studies for day students. This course fulfills the Humanities distribution requirement for the AMCS MA program. It also counts toward the MD and some concentration area requirements for the AMCS MA program.

Credit 3 units. UColl: ACF, ACH

U89 AMCS 4211 New Media Literacy, Culture and Education
At the closing of the 20th century, the "digital turn" began to shape how individuals learn, communicate, and interact with one another. Current and emerging media technologies have continued to change how individuals (youth and adults alike) gather information; consume, produce, and disseminate texts; and participate in both local and global communities through print- and screen-based platforms such as email, blog, podcast and mash-ups, among others. In this course, we will explore what we mean by technology, the various types and uses of technology and the relationship of technology to literacy and education. We will begin with characteristics of "new media" and consequences of the digital revolution. Then, we will examine conceptualizations of literacy in a historical context — from literacy as reading and writing to literacy as multimodality, convergence and participation. Finally, we will shift our inquiry to investigate how new media literacies and technologies are shaping (and are shaped by) different forms of popular culture in U.S. and international contexts, including parts of Asia, Australia, Europe, Africa, and North and South America. We will make explicit the connections to education and explore possible directions for research and practice, including copyright and fair use issues present in educational settings. Readings, discussions, and activities online and in actual communities will culminate in individual- and class-based new media productions. Prerequisite: at least junior standing or permission of the instructor.

Same as L12 Educ 4211

Credit 3 units. A&S IQ: SSC

U89 AMCS 4220 The Presidency and American Political Culture
This course seeks to analyze the ways in which the President of the United States is not only a political, but a symbolic head of the nation. This process of constructing the nation is mutually constitutive, in which the president works to construct the nation by rhetorically and materially uniting it, and the people construct the presidency, both in the powers they confer upon it and the ways in which they imagine its significance. Along with more traditional definitions of political power, this course will examine the presidential use of power through rhetoric and self-portrayal in such forms as portraiture and campaigns. Also included are the president's depictions of the presidency, such as photography, monumental architecture, and popular films. The specific case studies of presidential administrations include James Madison, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, Ronald Reagan, and Barack Obama.

Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH

U89 AMCS 423 Topics in American Politics
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 429 The Metropolis
While some humans have lived in cities for six thousand years, the world has experienced a metropolitan revolution over the last two centuries. Close to one-half of the world's population now lives in a city, suburb, or exurb. Today's metropolises are not only larger than ever before, they are much more complex. This course examines key seminal works that analyze the past, present, and future of this evolution. It discusses key theorists who have explored the history of the urban form; the nature of socio-economic and political metropolitan structures; the transformation of the built environment of the city; contemporary urban policy; and the future of the metropolis on a global scale.

Same as U19 SUST 329

Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 4331 Illness and the American Cultural Imagination
This multidisciplinary course examines how representations of illness in America reveal a culture that is always negotiating philosophical, ethical, and political questions about the body and disease. We will study a range of texts — medical articles, religious treatises, films, and history of public health — with a particular emphasis on fiction. Students will be asked to consider the distinction scholar Arthur Kleinman makes between illness and disease — illness as the patient's experience and disease as medicine's focus — in order to negotiate the subjective experience of illness and the biological reality of disease. We will explore how we understand illness through our metaphorical descriptions of it, our characterizations of those who contract it, and our visions of who/what cures it. Readings will demonstrate shifts in both popular and medical views of illness as we think about how different historical periods are marked by a preoccupation with specific diseases: small-pox, yellow fever,
cholera, tuberculosis, polio, cancer, AIDS, etc. This course fulfills the Humanities and Social Science distribution requirement for the AMCS MA program.

Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH, ACS

U89 AMCS 4400 How’re Things at Home? Family, Domestic Life and Material Culture Since the Civil War
This multidisciplinary course is a study of the cultural meanings of the objects with which Americans surround themselves and define their worlds — particularly in the spaces of the home. These domestic things — from the decorative to the utilitarian, the locally-made to the globally-circulated — have animated the cultural imagination often in the last 150 years, evoking ideas of individualism, private enterprise, personal identity, national security, the nuclear family, and the dangers of industrialization and greed. They have also symbolized American heritage and personal as well as collective memory, motivating a preservation movement that continues to influence views of the past today. And they have served as sites of cultural critique, as in the work of Marx, Veblen and Baudrillard. As we explore some of the dramatic shifts in material life occasioned by the rise of consumer capitalism, and look at objects of particular significance during this period, we will also consider influential theories and models of material culture study. Local cultural sites and museum collections will serve as laboratories for our work, and will likely require a couple visits outside of class time (which will be scheduled with input from the students). Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH, ACS

U89 AMCS 4402 Gateway to the Atomic Age: St. Louis and Nuclear Legacies of the Cold War
This course studies radioactive waste sites and illness in the vicinity of St. Louis arising from the region’s contribution to nuclear weapons production in the 20th century. We will examine the context of Cold War nuclear production and subsequent attempts to address its consequences for environment and health, with attention to political pressures, public understanding, and scientific knowledge, together with the universe of federal regulation and compensation emerging around the atom since 1945. Source material will include federal reports and correspondence produced by state agencies, journalistic and scholarly accounts, and mass media evidence generated from the early 20th century to the present. Includes field trips to local sites. Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH

U89 AMCS 442 Reading Historical Figures: Cultural Analysis and Afterlives
Walt Whitman famously wrote, “If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.” Although we will not be looking under any bootsoles in this course, we will be looking for — and finding — U.S. historical figures everywhere in contemporary culture, from television and film to fiction, advertising, and social media. During the semester, Whitman will serve as our case study, and students will be asked to read his poetry and prose. However, our ultimate aim is more wide-reaching. This course approaches a broad question — What is American identity now? — from a specific point of reference: the afterlives of figures from the past who are increasingly important to our modern national identity. During the semester, each student will undertake their own research project centered on a figure from the past whose presence in American life looms large today, such as Audre Lorde, Che Guevara, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, James Baldwin, or Alexander Hamilton, among others.

Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH, HSM, HUS

U89 AMCS 444 American Conspiracy
This course will trace the prevalence and power of modern conspiracy theories in American culture that have their roots in the birth of the republic and continue to flourish today. We will analyze the specificity of conspiracy theories — UFOs, Communists, the Moon landing, JFK’s assassination, AIDS and the CIA, 9/11 Truthers — but our purpose will be to “theorize” the conspiracy theory. How do Americans perceive and misperceive their culture, and for what ends? Much of our work will be methodological insofar as distrust and paranoia are produced in many realms — psychological, social, political — and we must organize and analyze these overlapping anxieties in our practice of American culture studies. This course fulfills the Humanities distribution requirement for the AMCS MA program. Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH

U89 AMCS 445 Introduction to American Culture Studies
This course will introduce students to the history and methods of the interdisciplinary field of American studies. Questions we will ask throughout the semester include: How do we define "culture," and how has that definition changed over time? What are the social, intellectual, and political stakes of how we define culture and the ways we study it? Throughout the semester, students will have the opportunity to read published work by AMCS-affiliated faculty, who will join the class to discuss their work and the practice of American studies. While the course will use AMCS’s four program initiatives — American Intimacies, Modern Segregation, Visual and Material Culture, and Performance and Pop Culture — as a means to consider the range of analytical methods commonly utilized by American studies scholars, the course will be useful to students in other fields interested learning more about social and cultural history and/or cultural studies. Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH, ACS

U89 AMCS 4501 American Drama
Topics in American Drama. Same as L15 Drama 453
Credit 3 units. A&S IQ: HUM Arch: HUM Art: HUM

U89 AMCS 463 Eve to Ifemelu: Gender and the Fall(s)
Gender and The Fall(s) will explore perceptions of gender, "virtue," and fallness throughout history and in different cultural contexts by focusing on a broad range of literary representations of women and men. We will read a series of works from multiple genres and cultures in order to examine how each text constructs, interrogates, contests, and/or promotes the concept of fallness. We will be particularly interested in the interactions and constructions of fallness and gender roles. How do these authors construct, envision, and re-envision the (their) fall(s) over time, and how are historical gender roles reified or revised by these authors? We will review scholarly texts from an array of disciplines such as psychology, English, history, autobiography, sociology, and political science in order to gain a multidisciplinary, academic framework in which to understand these falls. The course will also include other interdisciplinary elements such as film and art. Time will be dedicated to analyses of samples from various film versions of select works, focusing on these films’ own 20th- and 21st-century perceptions of the texts. We will also examine famous pieces of art that seek to illustrate and interpret the concept of
fallenness. This course is fully online. Only University College students receive credit for online courses.
Same as U92 WGSS 360
Credit 3 units. UColl: OLI

U89 AMCS 464 The Seductive Bargain: Fake News and the Controversies of the 2016 Election
The aftermath of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and election victory galvanized public attention with regard to how commonplace digital technologies were used to promote agendas at odds with liberal democratic values. The proliferation of fake news, hate speech, missing emails, trolling activity, and voting hacking as well as the spectre of Russian interference eroded confidence in the security of market-dominant technologies and the stability of political institutions. Bad actors weaponizing seemingly benign social media technologies shook the tech industry and drew the ire of politicians. At the same time, the public learned anew how the industry collected and capitalized on user information for corporate profit. These realizations reignited debate about tech company accountability, platform security, free speech, privacy, and national security, and it cast these concerns as symptoms of a democracy under siege. In this class, we will investigate the cultural and political fallout of the nefarious subversion campaigns that defined the 2016 election and center these activities within the broader historical context, including the Facebook scandals of 2016 and 2017, the Edward Snowden leaks of 2012, the emergence of internet culture in the 1990s, and the protest movement against data aggregation of the 1960s. From this will emerge a deeper understanding of the complex issues related to privacy, free speech, business practices, and national security as well as of frameworks for considering the ethical, legal, and moral implications of a culture deeply wedded to technologies of convenience. This course fulfills the Humanities or Social Science distribution requirement for the AMCS MA program. The course may also count toward the undergraduate major or minor.
Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH, ACS, ML

U89 AMCS 465 Studies in American Cultural Identity: Beginnings to the Civil War
An exploration of early American literary, visual, and musical art in relation to key themes, decisive moments, and cultural developments which have shaped our national character and influenced our first internationally recognized artists, as the formation of a distinctly American art begins. Struggles for religious, racial, and gender rights, American violence, polarities of innocence and experience, individualism and conformity, the American Dream and its dreamers, all receive attention. Viewing of American Neoclassical and Romantic visual art and architecture, listening to colonial, Federalist, Jacksonian and post-Jacksonian era songs and ballads, and reading from major and less well-known 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century literary and historical figures. This course fulfills the Humanities or Arts distribution requirement for the AMCS master's program.
Credit 3 units. UColl: ACF, ACH

U89 AMCS 4680 American Environmental History
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 4692 Perspectives on America in the 1950s and 1960s
This course will combine an effort to explicate particular "texts" with an exploration of how such things might be at once a way into and the product of a particular time and place. The material for our study will be drawn from the rich cultural tumult of post-war America and will include such books as The Catcher in the Rye; The Invisible Man; The Lonely Crowd; The Feminine Mystique; On the Road; JB: The Making of a Counter Culture; and Armies of the Night. Additional texts will include movies, political speeches, and such events as the Nixon-Khrushchev kitchen debate, the marches on Washington, and the 1968 Democratic National Convention. This course is designed for graduate students with a strong interest in doing research on some aspect of American culture and who will bring the perspectives of their home departments to this interdisciplinary class. Undergraduate admission with instructor's permission only.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 474 Studies in American Cultural Identity: The Civil War to the Jazz Age
The course is an exploration of later 19th- to early 20th-century American literary, visual, and musical art in relation to key themes, decisive moments, and cultural developments which have shaped and defined our national character. Struggles for religious, racial, and gender rights; American violence; our polarities of innocence and experience, of individual and group welfare, individualism and conformity; and complex expressions of The American Dream and its dreamers, all receive attention. We view American Post-Romantic, Realistic, Naturalistic, and Post-World War I visual art, architecture, and photography; listen to late 19th-century, turn of the century, and Jazz Age music; and read from major and less well-known literary figures to consider how the social and political developments of the time influenced our artists as the flourishing of a distinctly American art became an internationally acknowledged fact. The course counts toward the American culture studies major for day students, and fulfills the Humanities or Arts distribution requirement for the AMCS master's program.
Credit 3 units. UColl: ACF, ACH

U89 AMCS 475D Landscapes Through Time: The History of St. Louis’ Built Environment
From the Mississippian mound builders to the urban conditions of the present day, this course will investigate the different approaches of various cultures to creating built environments that meet the needs of their time in terms of landscapes and structures. Using the City of St. Louis and particularly its riverfront district as an example, the course will examine thorough look at the introduction of this art form and explores its contributions to the American cultural imagination its first 20 years. We will view and analyze series from the 1950s and 1960s, and consider the representation of nation, family, gender, ethnicity, and other issues debated in norms and policies of this era. We will also examine the introduction of television into the home, exploring how an appliance could affect notions of community and family. Students will leave the class with an understanding of the complicated and contested role television played in the establishment of the post-WWII economy and as a mainstream arbiter of 1960s social movements. Prerequisite: Refer to course listings.
Credit 3 units.
In this course we examine social inequality in the contemporary United States, with a particular focus on disparities related to health, wealth, housing and neighborhoods, criminal justice, and education. The St. Louis metropolitan region will serve as a guiding case study, tying together the course themes with a common example of how inequality shapes material and political life. We will investigate the current empirical reality and historical roots of American inequality, the key theories and methodological tools used to examine and explain inequality, the institutions responsible for its reproduction, and possibilities for reducing inequality via social policy and social movement. Within each topic area, we will pay special attention to the significance of race and ethnicity, social class, and gender — as well as their intersections and cleavages. We will largely constrain our inspection of inequality to American metropolitan areas as we analyze the spatial or place-based effects associated with disparities in urban America. Readings are drawn from sociology, urban history, geography, political science, economics, social epidemiology, and education.

Credit 3 units. UColl: ACS

U89 AMCS 485 Worth a Thousand Words: American Visual History and Methods

"A picture is worth a thousand words." "The camera never lies." These idioms capture our collective understanding of photography as a form of visual evidence, demonstrating our faith in a photograph's operation as "proof." At the same time, American history is full of examples of photographic practices that manipulated or otherwise challenged this assumption. This seeming contradiction invites us to think critically about photographs' function as historical documents and how we use them to write history. Students in this course will study historical examples of Americans' use of photography to challenge negative stereotypes, pursue economic opportunity, and claim civil rights. We will also examine the different ways that scholars use photographic images and archives to study American culture and history. Through class visits to archives on and near campus, students will become acquainted with the visual resources available to them and the procedures for conducting research in those archives. Students will increase their visual competencies by working closely with images sourced from these archives as well as their own family and personal photography collections. Reading and writing assignments will introduce students to key theories of visual history and archives, examine case studies in American visual history, and build toward a final research project, designed in collaboration with the instructor, related to the student's broader research interests. This course fulfills the Humanities or Arts distribution requirement for the AMCS MA program. The course may also count towards the undergraduate major or minor.

Credit 3 units. UColl: ACF, ACH
U89 AMCS 4891 The Science and Politics of Testing in the U.S.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 491 "St. Louis Got the Best of Me": Music in American Culture
This course will explore how music functions as a folklore, centering on the many musical styles, musicians, and fans that have shaped St. Louis from the early ragtime to today’s diverse music scene. The term “folk music” may bring images of banjos and accordions, but every kind of music has a “folk” — folk who use music to represent their identities, their beliefs, and their struggles. Throughout the semester, students will question what “American” music sounds like and what happens to music and culture as it is played, recorded, and represented. St. Louis provides us with both ingroup and outgroup musicians, inciting the blues and Jeff Tweedy, encouraging ethnic traditions from Ireland to Bosnia and beyond, providing a haven for fans like the Juggalos and a nationally renowned superfan, and fostering a homegrown fiddling style all our own. The course will use St. Louis’ music culture — with lots of listening — to examine what music means to both ingroup and outgroup musicians and listeners, and it will also look at the roles music plays in an ongoing dialogue about authenticity, traditionality, and appropriation between the individual, the community, and the larger society. This course satisfies the Fine Arts requirement for the Master of Arts in American Culture Studies.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 492 Decoding the City
While architecture and infrastructure are worthy of study in themselves, often they signify more complex cultural meanings, mask efforts to erase or reorder the city, and conceal histories of injustice. This course presents methods for “reading” the built form of the American city to decode histories of architecture, culture, public policy and economics. City space can be read literally, but this course will unpack the symbolic meanings of urban spaces, neighborhoods, buildings and sites. Students will undertake readings that will present methods for understanding and analyzing the city’s form, before delving into a specific case study of the Mill Creek Valley. As St. Louis’ largest African-American neighborhood, but almost completely erased between 1959 and 1965 using city and federal funds, the site of the neighborhood remains a potent and under-examined part of St. Louis. The course will examine the history of the neighborhood as well as related histories of federal and local urban renewal policies, African-American cultural history and historic preservation. Research into the neighborhood will include experiences at local archives where students will learn to attain and apply primary source documents vital to urban history including Census records, building permits, municipal ordinances and insurance maps. Additional readings will offer insights into possible methods for interpreting and commemorating places that illuminate the urban built environment’s historic past. The final project in this course will entail students collaboratively working on a public interpretive project for Mill Creek Valley where they can apply both methods of decoding and curating the city. This course satisfies the Humanities and Social Science requirement for the master’s program in American Culture Studies.
Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH, ACS, HSM, HUS

U89 AMCS 494 Voices in Action: History and Poetry of Protest in America (1930 to Present)
What sparks and sustains people’s movements for social justice? This history and creative-writing course explores the contexts and expressions of 20th century and contemporary protest movements, ranging from labor, civil rights, the Vietnam War, ethnic people and women’s movements, to contemporary social and environmental justice movements. We will explore speeches, manifestos, visual and oral texts, songs, and poetry to consider how dissent is voiced in response to specific social contexts and historic events. We will consider the role of personal expression in enacting democracy, focusing on poetry that helps articulate what is at stake in the protest movements of the 20th and 21st centuries. We will examine how language moves people, raising awareness of the facts and felt experiences of injustice, helping to fuel social movements and “call forth a public” to make change. Assignments include a mix of historical analysis, ethnographic and participatory work, creative writing, and reflection.
Credit 3 units. UColl: ACF, ACH, ACS, HUM

U89 AMCS 499 Ideologies in American Life II: From the Gilded Age to the Present
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 500 Independent Study
An independent research project under the supervision of a member of the AMCS faculty. Approved proposal must be presented at the time of registration. Open only to students in the AMCS program. For more information, contact the assistant dean for Graduate Programs at 314-935-6700.
Credit variable, maximum 3 units.

U89 AMCS 502 Directed Research Project
An independent research project under the supervision of a member of the AMCS faculty. Approved proposal must be presented at the time of registration. Required for Master of Arts in American Culture Studies. Open only to students admitted to the AMCS program.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 503 Master’s Thesis
An independent research project under the supervision of a member of the AMCS faculty. Approved proposal must be presented at the time of registration. Open only to students admitted to the AMCS program. Prerequisite: U89 502.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 5053 The Progressive Era in St. Louis and the Nation, 1900-1920
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 506 Spiritual Quests in American Culture
In contemporary American spiritual questing, Americans find respite from alienation, cynicism, materialism and routine as they seek grounding and growth in spiritual realities. It is often through resistance to the American cultural landscape that individuals search for personal meaning and deeper social connection and understanding. Their quests take many forms, running the gamut from political to monastic. Some are religious, many are not. In this course, we identify and explore American spiritual life within social, political and economic contexts. For
historical grounding, we will read A Common Faith by John Dewey and The Varieties of Religious Experience by William James. We will examine recent scholarship on spirituality by reading works by Parker Palmer, Henri Nouwen and Amanda Porterfield among others. We will also read a host of spiritual memoirs by writers such as Elizabeth Gilbert, Kathleen Norris and Anne Lamott. The class will attempt to discern the uniquely American characteristics within the narratives we read. We will also pay special attention to the distinctiveness of spiritual language as it is noted by many writers in the field. Its terms, in general public discourse, are often denigrated, marginalized, sugar-coated or omitted altogether. In this course, we legitimize and lend life to such terms as hope, vision, gratitude, silence, healing, joy and wonder among others.

Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 507 John Dewey's Vision of American Democracy
This course begins with an examination of the life and education of John Dewey. We go on to study some of Dewey’s works on democracy and pragmatism with a focus on his commitment to democratic “methods” and ideals. We also focus on Dewey’s notion that the moral aims and foundations of American democracy distinguish it from other democratic conceptions. We examine how Dewey links his views regarding liberty, community and individualism to the domains of education, philosophy and public life. Finally, we ground our studies in an analysis of democracy as it exists in America today, and consider if and how Dewey’s theories prevail.

Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 511 The Legal Landscape in a Changing American Society
This course is designed to examine the qualitative relationship between shifts in the transformations in law in America and the structure of American behavioral patterns and values. The course will scrutinize some of the intersections between the transformations in contemporary law and legal practices and the values that Americans impute to their legal system. Potentially, this review will include appraisals of such topics as: (a) Americans’ perceptions of their legal agents; (b) claims of excessive litigation; (c) inequalities in access to the legal system; (d) law as mass media events; (e) shifting assessments of liability; (f) malaise over the capacities of juries; (g) the conversion of the legal profession to the business of law; and (h) the elusive costs of attempting to effect justice.

Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 512 The First Amendment: Free Speech and Free Press in the 21st Century
We will consider First Amendment history and theory with attention to current events. In the war against terrorism, how should the Supreme Court balance the demands of free speech and national security? Should the Supreme Court interpret the First Amendment to permit the government to punish “hate speech” about members of minority racial and religious groups? Are computer-generated images of children performing sexual acts protected by the First Amendment? Can government make speech denying the Holocaust a crime? Although most of the materials are Supreme Court decisions, the analysis of First Amendment issues is not the exclusive province of lawyers and judges.

Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 5151 Hollywood on Hollywood
Credit 3 units. UColl: ACF

U89 AMCS 516 Lewis and Clark: Exploration, Encounter, and Culture
This course examines the specifics of the 1804-1806 “Voyage of Discovery” led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, and the expedition to investigate the dynamic conditions in North America at the turn of the 19th century. It also investigates the expedition as an adventure story, as a mythic construct, as a scientific endeavor, as a diplomatic mission, and as a geopolitical tool of national expansion. Encounters with Euro-American, African-American, and Native American cultures will also be examined.

Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 518 Strange Sounds: Five American Musical Pioneers
This course examines five American composers whose music represented a significant departure from the artistic conventions of their time: Charles Ives, John Cage, Harry Partch, Steve Reich, and Pauline Oliveros. By studying the challenging musical and written works of these American experimentalists, we will become familiar with some of the major currents of contemporary American art and music, and also discuss many provocative ideas advanced by these composers concerning the nature of music and its role in life and culture. Regular listening and reading assignments. No previous musical background required.

Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 519 Exploring America’s Musical Landscape
Through recorded examples and archival video footage, students will investigate the rich and diverse character of America’s musical landscape with particular emphasis on understanding American music and musical practice within the larger context of American culture. Music studied will include the traditional folk and religious music of the Appalachian Mountains and Mississippi Delta, jazz, blues, country music, popular music, and America’s distinctive contributions in the realm of classical music. No previous musical background required.

Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 5203 America: Through a Glass Darkly
This course studies depictions of America by non-Americans. We will examine the social, political, and economic aspects of their accounts and their influence on America’s beliefs, policies, and international reputation. The class will consider fundamental values as well as ethnic and gender-based differences. Comparing historical periods from both Western and Eastern perspectives, students will read texts written during the past three centuries from England, France, Germany, Cuba, and China. For the colonial/Revolutionary War period, we will study Charlevoix, History & Description of New France and Crévecoeur, "Letters from an American Farmer." Readings from the 19th century include Tocqueville, Democracy in America; Frances Trollope, Views of Society and Manners in America; Dickens, American Notes; Francis Lieber, The Stranger in America; and newspaper articles by José Martí. Our discussions of the 20th century will focus on Kafka, America; Francis Hsu, Americans and Chinese; Beauvoir, America: Day to Day; and Baudrillard, America.

Same as U98 MLA 5203

Credit 3 units.
U89 AMCS 5217 Paint It Black: Understanding American Film Noir
A product of highly diverse influences and traditions, film noir is known for its stylized visual aesthetic, cracking dialogue, moral ambivalence, and existential paranoia. Its style and language continue to inform filmmakers in Hollywood and worldwide. This seminar positions the aesthetic shapes and traumatic narratives of film noir within the context of American culture and film history during the war and post-war years. As importantly, it explores film noir as a test case in order to probe notions of film history, genre, and authorship, of cultural and intermedial transfer and the popular. Required screenings will take place during the second half of each week's class. Films will likely include many of the following: The Maltese Falcon, Phantom Lady, Double Indemnity, Laura, Gun Crazy, Somewhere in the Night, The Glass Key, The Blue Gardenia and Chinatown. Prerequisite: Consult Course Listings.
Same as U98 MLA 5217
Credit 3 units. Ucoll: ACF

U89 AMCS 524 The American Dream: Myth or Reality
This course will examine the origins and history of "The American Dream." What do we mean when we use this term? How does it resonate and influence our politics, advertising, and especially the arts? We will discuss the experience of immigration and assimilation, how foreigners with different cultural backgrounds enter American society. Beginning with the implications of America's image as a "brave new world" in European thought and philosophy (including Shakespeare's The Tempest), and the prescient view of our culture by de Tocqueville and others, we will examine how the dream of success and wealth has been depicted and employed in theater, fiction, cinema, and the visual arts. Texts include: Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, William's The Glass Menagerie, Miller's Death of a Salesman, West's Day of the Locust, Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun, Albee's "The Zoo Story" and "The American Dream," and John Guare's The House of Blue Leaves. We will consider modern painters whose work offers a commentary on the dream, such as Edward Hopper and Andy Warhol. We will also study cinematic innovators from Charlie Chaplin to Orson Welles and Francis Ford Coppola who have used "The American Dream" as significant elements in their work.
Same as U98 MLA 524
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 5241 Transatlantic Egos: Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson, Ted Hughes
Same as L14 E Lit 524
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 530 Religion in American Culture: Narratives in Personal Spirituality
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 532 Power, Privilege, and the Law in America
The goal of this course is to study the role of law in producing, replicating, and disrupting hierarchies of power and privilege, particularly those based on racial groups, gender, social and economic class, and sexual orientation. The course will work from a book that includes articles, essays and cases that cut across disciplines.
Putnam Jacobi, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Louisa May Alcott, Joan Jacobs Brumberg, and Natalie Angier.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 541 FDR, the Presidency, and America in the 20th Century
This course will examine the impact of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidency on American politics and culture, the economic and social welfare of the country, and the nation's role in world affairs. Did the Roosevelt presidency influence how Americans of different class, race and gender relate to one another? Did it influence the role of the federal government during two of the most significant events of the 20th century, the Great Depression and the Second World War? We will probe these questions and related issues to assess Roosevelt's historical legacy.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 5461 Rise of Civilization in the New World
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 549 Greening of Hollywood
The class will analyze presentations of the natural world, the environment, and environmental issues in American film. Applying the methodology of eco-criticism, we will examine how American film has responded to and portrayed environmentalism and nature. Combining eco-criticism with film studies, we will discuss how the interaction between audience and film both educates audiences and illustrates the state of environmentalism in American culture. The aim will be to find a common ground between the films' portrayal of environmentalism and nature with discourses that occur publicly. We'll seek to identify any system of images, conventions, languages, and discourses that provide insight into the messages Americans are receiving. Furthermore, by demonstrating how Hollywood portrays environmentalism, nature or environmental problems, the class will pursue a perspective on how Americans are dealing with "environmental problems," its discourses, assumptions and stereotypes.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 553 Lewis and Clark: Exploration, Discovery, and the Americanization of the West
This course examines the 1804-1806 "Voyage of Discovery" led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. It will also investigate broader issues of culture by looking at how peoples of different perspectives and cultures interact; how they explore the unknown and try to explain it; how they gather and develop "knowledge" and accept or reject information. Through a careful reading of the journals written by members of the Corps of Discovery, related documents, and supplemental scholarship, we will examine the expedition from the perspectives of its participants, Native Americans, African Americans, and the Spanish and French peoples of the borderlands. We will then shift to considering how scholars have investigated themes associated with the expedition. These two pieces are designed to work together, providing both a foundation in the historical specifics of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and a scholarly context for considering North American cultures at the turn of the 19th century.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 555 American in the 1930s: America Responds to the Great Depression
The course is a multidisciplinary approach to the 1930s and American responses to the Great Depression. The course will consider the contradictory impulses toward experimental, escapist, documentary, modernist, and reactionary responses. Some of the topics the class will examine are the escapist nature of American cinema during the era, American Literature, the development and popularity of radio, the music of Woody Guthrie, the Federal Arts Project, the rise of documentary style photography, the New York World's Fair, and political activism.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 558 Songs of the American Dream: The Accompaniment of Our Social Identity
A nation's musical heritage is more significant than a "recording" of its cultural evolution. It is, in fact, a multi-dynamic propellant of that evolution. This course examines the genesis and function of American musical genres, and the defining composers and artists who have provided the sonic architecture for society's evolution, and continue to define our individual and collective American identities. The Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, World War II, the Sixties Youth Revolution, the Civil Rights movement, etc., can be defined, and were often precipitated, by their signature musical styles and artists. Organized by the chronological occurrence of major cultural, socioeconomic, and geopolitical events occurring in the past century, "Songs of the American Dream" is a course designed to examine how the interdependence of music and social identity has nurtured and inspired our individual creative lives.
Credit 3 units. UColl: ACF

U89 AMCS 560 The Constitution in American Political Culture
The U.S. Constitution serves not only as the country's supreme law but also as a powerful symbol, frequently deployed and much contested. Its meaning as a symbol derives from longstanding principles and from shared and remembered experience. Although constant in important respects, that meaning has also changed in significant ways over time. This course examines the cultural understanding that the Constitution embodies and the role it plays in American politics, using historical episodes such as the Framing and Reconstruction; recurring issues such as the commerce power and war power; materials such as court opinions, political tracts, public opinion surveys, and official acts; and throughout, the application of constitution-based claims, in both modern and historical contexts.
Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH

U89 AMCS 562 Metropolitan America: Cultures and Landscapes of the 20th-Century City
This course introduces students to theories and issues in the study of urban and landscape history. We focus our examination of American cities, their cultures, and their built environments in the metropolitan age. We approach the American city as a landscape of socially and historically produced urban spaces, both public and private, whose forms are the result of multiple negotiations at many levels. We study cities as "texts," as legible palimpsests upon which various groups attempt to inscribe power and resistance. At the same time, we place the "textual" city within the broad contexts of political, economic, and cultural forces that shape it over time.
appreciation is a primary goal of the course, which will assess the spectrum of American life. Avoiding hagiography, legend and compelling examples of transformative changes across the music across a span of decades when popular singers offer an inside look at the social history of the United States in the realm of popular American popular singers who embody the cultural, economic, and social history of the United States. Covers the voices, careers and lives of 12 representative American Culture Studies (08/15/19)

Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 566 What Were They Thinking? Founding Intent and the Institutions of the U.S. Government
When the institutions that structure the U.S. government were formed, they were supported or rejected by different kinds of arguments. Some of these arguments were moral in nature, but most focused on the legal and political effects these institutions would have on the nation. For example, would a low presidential salary encourage only those with pure motives to run for office, or would it encourage bribery and kickbacks once there? Were large electoral districts likely to produce representatives better able to secure the common good, or would the more distant relationship between representative and voter undermine a representative's accountability to their constituents? Using some of the classic texts from the history of American political thought — including a large portion of the The Federalist — we will investigate what the founders were thinking when they argued for, and against, the institutions that were proposed. We will look at large, constitutional institutions — like the Electoral College to select the president — as well as more recent, non-constitutional institutions — like the Senate filibuster. We will also consider some unsuccessful proposals — a 20-year presidential term of office, or giving states a veto over federal legislation. Our focus will be unpacking the expected practical effects of these institutions, and ask whether and why these expectations were met.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 567 Machine Politics in the U.S.
Machine politics practiced in American cities are unique in the Western world. Machine politics, whether in the form of a hierarchical machine or a more fragmented “machine style,” began in the mid-19th century and remains in some cities to this day. More often than not, machine politics is principally located in the Midwest and the eastern United States, home to many immigrant groups. Machine politics functions as a series of exchange relationships — favors — regarding employment, contracting, and the licensing of vice. It has provided an informal network of social services although it deals in individual cases and not systemic causes. Machine politics engenders its own code of ethics with a strong emphasis on loyalty. In this course, we will look in depth at a fragmented machine city — St. Louis — and the city that had the strongest and most powerful hierarchical machine, Chicago. We will be able to draw comparisons and contrasts and discern how institutions affect political culture and political behavior, including race relations.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 569 Representing Jazz: Music, Movies, Art
This course recognizes the importance of graduate students’ need to understand the overall cultural and academic importance of philosophy, as represented in sequential art, and the way comics studies, as an emerging field and body of theory, fits into this larger picture. This course will investigate how a new topic (comics) develops a new suite of theory and methodology (sequential art theory) and works its way into the academy.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 571 American Popular Singers (1920s-1980s)
Covers the voices, careers and lives of 12 representative American popular singers who embody the cultural, economic, and social history of the United States in the realm of popular music across a span of decades when popular singers offer compelling examples of transformative changes across the spectrum of American life. Avoiding hagiography, legend and appreciation is a primary goal of the course, which will assess these often iconic figures in fresh, resolutely historical terms to understand the place in American popular culture and history. This analysis will be based primarily on audio recordings and film and television appearances, supplemented by textual evidence connected directly to the singers, such as interviews and autobiographies. Recent secondary sources, both historical and critical, will inform the course as well. This course counts toward the AMCS MA distribution requirement in Arts.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 5711 Race & Gender: Social/Historical Transformations in the Broadway Musical
Credit 3 units. UColl: ACF, ACH

U89 AMCS 5722 Comics and the Emerging Theory of Sequential Art
This course examines the emerging field of comics studies and sequential art theory as part of investigating the emerging understanding of sequential art as a medium. While not a uniquely American medium, comics have a specifically American context, and the emerging field of comics studies has a particular place and a particular role in the American academy. This course recognizes the importance of graduate students’ need to understand the overall cultural and academic importance of visual culture, as represented in sequential art, and the way comics studies, as an emerging field and body of theory, fits into this larger picture. This course will investigate how a new topic (comics) develops a new suite of theory and methodology (sequential art theory) and works its way into the academy.
Credit 3 units.

U89 AMCS 575 American Cultural Identity: The Civil War to The Jazz Age
In his Letters From An American Farmer, J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur wasn’t the first nor will he be the last to encounter the complex issues revealed by even a modest exploration of American identity. We will do so together in this course by examining selected Post-Civil War literature, music, visual art, and popular culture, paying special attention to recurrent themes woven into the fabric of our cultural heritage. It is a truism that understanding cultural patterns of the past provides a benchmark for a grasp of the complexities we find around us today. Learning to translate knowledge from one context to another illustrates one of the course’s central themes: how visual, written, and performed art is rarely produced in cultural isolation, but rather from a rich matrix of social, geographic, psychological, political, historic, spiritual, economic, scientific, and accidental developments.
Credit 3 units. UColl: ACH, ACS

U89 AMCS 623A American Public Art: From Monuments to Movements
Credit 3 units.