

American Culture Studies

The **Graduate Certificate in American Culture Studies** (AMCS) enables doctoral students to develop multidisciplinary expertise and encourages them to bring that added competence to bear in dissertation research that, while satisfying the demands of their principal disciplines, is broad-based and informed by studies from across the humanities and the social sciences.

AMCS brings together a community of graduate students and faculty with overlapping interests in American topics. Through formal and informal intellectual exchange, they share knowledge, methods, and ideas across the boundaries that define the traditional academic disciplines. This intellectual community promotes the give-and-take of ideas, making graduate study more stimulating and graduate research more original and creative.

Students who satisfy certificate requirements will receive the Graduate Certificate in American Culture Studies along with the award of their PhD. This certificate is one of several interdisciplinary certificates offered by the Office of Graduate Studies, Arts & Sciences. The certificate helps its holders to build academic careers — including careers that involve interdisciplinary teaching — and to develop distinctive research profiles.

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Faculty

Director

Paige McGinley
Associate Professor of Performing Arts
PhD, Brown University

Assistant Director

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Lecturer in American Culture Studies
PhD, Washington University in St. Louis

Director of Graduate Studies

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Associate Professor of Art History and Archaeology
PhD, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Director of Undergraduate Studies

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PhD, Saint Louis University

Program Faculty

Elaine Peña
Professor of Performing Arts, American Culture Studies, and Anthropology
PhD, Northwestern University

Sabnam Ghosh
Lecturer in Asian American Studies
PhD, University of Georgia

Zachary Manditch-Prattas
Lecturer in African and African American Studies and American Culture Studies
PhD, University of California, Berkeley

Kristoffer Smemo
Lecturer in History and American Culture Studies
PhD, University of California at Santa Barbara

Dave Walsh
Lecturer in American Culture Studies
MA, Washington University in St. Louis

Degree Requirements

- American Culture Studies, Graduate Certificate

Courses

Visit online course listings to view semester offerings for L98 AMCS.

L98 AMCS 504 Local Archives: Directed Study in St. Louis
Credit variable, maximum 3 units.

L98 AMCS 506L Street Cultures of the Americas
Same as L38 Span 506
Credit 3 units.

L98 AMCS 5152 Pluralism, Politics, and Religion
A graduate seminar for students in social sciences, history or philosophy, focusing on issues of multiculturalism, ethnic and religious pluralism, and governance of ethnic and religious diversity in European, Asian, and North American societies. Course is open to graduate students in all disciplines and is part of an exchange program with Societies, Religions, Laicités Laboratory in Paris. Independent research is expected; nature of research will vary by discipline but can include ethnographic, historical, or theoretical work, to be evaluated by instructor in consultation with appropriate departmental supervisors. Instructor's permission is required.
Same as L48 Anthro 5152
Credit 3 units.

L98 AMCS 519 American Political Institutions

This course provides an overview of the scholarly work on American political institutions. Readings include the classic literature on political behavior, interest groups, Congress, the Executive, and the Court. Same as L32 Pol Sci 520
Credit 3 units.

L98 AMCS 5243 Seminar: The 20th Century

Same as L14 E Lit 524
Credit 3 units.

L98 AMCS 535 Graduate Seminar: Performance and Protest in the Long Civil Rights Movement

Same as L15 Drama 535
Credit 3 units.

L98 AMCS 5370 Music and Performance: Pleasure and Politics in Popular Music

Christopher Small has asserted that music is not a thing but an activity--something that people DO. Starting from this premise, this course explores popular music in performance and introduces students to the flourishing scholarship at the intersection of performance studies, sound studies, and popular music studies. We will attend to sound, music, listening, and voice--and we will consider these elements of performance in combination with costume, choreography, stage design, and audience participation and interaction. Exploring the choices of performers and the expectations of audience members in settings from gospel churches to Radio City Music Hall, this course moves through a wide variety of musical genres, including cabaret, blues, opera, musical theater, and rock. We will consider the pleasure and politics embraced by everyday people and activists who have used music in protest movements from the labor movement to Black Lives Matter. We also attend performances around St. Louis, guided by the interests of the class. Upper-level undergraduates and graduate students (enrolled under a 500-number) with an interest in music, theater, dance, cultural history, American studies, and African American studies are especially welcome.
Same as L98 AMCS 4370
Credit 3 units. A&S IQ: HUM BU: HUM EN: H

L98 AMCS 540 Prefiguration and Performance

"Prefigurative politics" describes activists' creation of a desired future world in the present. The term has been used to describe social movements (from Occupy to Tahrir Square to the Movement for Black Lives); Black and interracial intentional communities pursuing racial justice (including the Harlem Ashram and the Highlander Folk School); and experiments in radical pedagogy (such as Freedom Schools). Prefiguration takes many forms: in staging a new world, activists might establish systems of mutual aid or other models of care; promote a model of participatory democracy; challenge the relationship between the state and its citizens; establish new histories and myths; reimagine economic models; and/or create new aesthetic forms. Political theorists and sociologists have much to teach us about prefigurative politics and the many debates that surround it. For example, what is the relationship between prefiguration and political strategy? Are the two at odds, or compatible? Students enrolled in this course will work assiduously to assess this literature. We will then put the contemporary scholarship on prefigurative politics into conversation with a set of conversations emerging from performance theory that traverse similar terrain, among them debates about performance, utopia, and futurity; explorations of rehearsal and simulation; and the performativity of

assembly. We will use our work to make sense of our contemporary moment, consider the performance and performativity of politics, and draw inspiration from those who have worked and continue to work to build "a new world in the shell of the old."
Same as L15 Drama 540
Credit 3 units.

L98 AMCS 5450 Writing Black Lives: The Theory and Literary History of African American Autobiography

This course is an intensive overview of Black autobiographical writing. We begin with the premise that the autobiography has been one of the earliest forms--and the major foundation--of the Black American literary tradition. We will begin with selective slave narratives and then proceed to variety of autobiographies--some by literary people, some by celebrities, some by politicians, some by people of opposing political orientations. We will also read some of the significant critical studies that have been written about Black autobiography and autobiography in general. The aim of the course is simple: To Understand the aesthetic nature, political purpose, and cultural history of Black American autobiography and its relationship to and departure from the larger tradition of autobiographical writing in the United States. We will also devote a portion of the course to looking at one major Black biographer who wrote about Black subjects: Shirley Graham Du Bois, who wrote books on Black heroic figures for young readers.
Same as L90 AFAS 545
Credit 3 units.

L98 AMCS 560 Senior Honors Seminar in American Culture Studies

This course is required for students seeking college honors through American Culture Studies. Students will discuss research methods and make regular research reports, both to the instructor and for other students. Prerequisite: satisfactory standing as a candidate for senior honors (3.5 cumulative GPA) and permission of thesis director.
Credit variable, maximum 3 units.

L98 AMCS 561 Seminar: Narrative and the Figure of the Storyteller

Graduate Seminar: Topics vary
Same as L14 E Lit 561
Credit 3 units.

L98 AMCS 5630 Mellon Postdoctoral Seminar: Theorizing the Body

Same as L14 E Lit 5631
Credit 4 units.

L98 AMCS 5884 Advanced Seminar: The Roots of the American Working Classes: Myths, Realities, Histories

The diverse realities of American labor and working-class experience have long been submerged under layers of politics and ideology. How should we study the lives of working people? What questions should we ask? Where do we go to answer them? This research seminar engages the lived experiences of the American working classes, in all their complexity, over the long 19th- and 20th-centuries, to the present. The course has the double project of (1) exploring the roots of mythologies about American working people that have the effect of distorting or erasing their experiences, efforts and accomplishments, and struggles for organization, visibility, citizenship, and power, with special attention to mythologies about American workers who are non-white, non-male, and non-U.S.-born who did/do not fit conventional tropes of "American labor" or "the white worker"; and (2) exploring the roots of working people's experiences, as shaped by forces of technology, class, race, gender and sexuality, religion, nationalism, and violence: what are the challenges, conceptual and archival, of studying the people, in their working and familial/community lives, as producers and consumers, in

their organizing efforts, and in their civic and political capacities? How did the transformation of work, technology, culture, and society over this long era from Enslavement to Artificial Intelligence, from Blackface Minstrelsy to Hip Hop, shape working people's lives and struggles? How did working people survive cataclysmic crises, from the Civil War to Covid, and mold the evolution of American citizenship and democracy? Each student will produce a 12-15 page original research paper related to the course material, based on an analysis of primary sources, in consultation with the instructor, and due at the end of the semester; the course is designed to closely mentor students in this project.
Same as L22 History 4884
Credit 3 units. A&S IQ: HUM, SC EN: H

L98 AMCS 645 Introduction to American Culture Studies

An introduction to interdisciplinary approaches to the study of American culture. The class will examine the relationship between cultural criticism and scholarship on American culture, the history of the American Studies and cultural studies movements, the simultaneous turn to "historicist" approaches in literary studies and to "textualist" approaches to historical studies, the moral and interpretive implications of the shift from a modernist to a postmodernist stance in cultural inquiry, and the challenges that multiculturalist and transnational perspectives pose to the study of a national American culture. Many of the readings will emphasize trends in cultural history, but will also include works in anthropology, art and architectural history, literary history, media studies, political and social theory, and religious studies.
Credit 3 units.
