AMST 340: Introduction to Theories and Methods in American Studies  
Dr. Robert Chester  
Office Hours: By appointment  
Class Time: Tu & Thu, 12:30-1:45  
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Course Description  
AMST 340, Introduction to Theories and Methods in American Studies, is a class for AMST majors, the first of a two-part set of courses that will culminate in your capstone project for the major. In the senior capstone project in AMST 450, you will produce a piece of original research on a topic you propose and develop in consultation with your professors and with feedback from your peers. In AMST 340, you will develop the formal proposal for your capstone project while expanding your knowledge of American Studies research and methods. We shall concentrate on mastering key framing concepts for research in American Studies and how students and scholars perform interdisciplinary research methods and analysis.

We will devote much of AMST 340 to helping you, as an AMST major, find a research question you care about, identify sources and devise research methods to study that question, and cultivate your voice as a scholar/citizen. You should expect to put in a lot of effort defining your topic, articulating it in the form of a clear research question, searching in both the library and online for relevant sources, and developing an interdisciplinary research method of analysis to answer your key question. AMST 340 is also designed to help you locate yourself as a practitioner of American studies and identify where and how your research interests fit into the broader scholarship of our field.

AMST 340 asks that you participate as an engaged learner and an active member of this American Studies learning community. You will need to take responsibility for your own research project, and support your fellow students by providing critical but friendly feedback to help them shape their research proposals and consider new ideas or new angles on their topics. Success in both AMST 340 and AMST 450 is highly correlated with finding effective ways to save yourself from your worst disorganization and procrastination tendencies.

Learning Objectives
- Develop each student's voice and contributions as an American studies researcher
- Hone your analytic and methodological skills for undertaking interdisciplinary research in American Studies.
- Craft an interdisciplinary research proposal for your capstone project that raises a defensible and significant research question
- Improve your library and online research skills
- Learn to provide effective and constructive feedback to help your fellow students broaden their thinking and improve their research proposals

Required Texts

Week 1: Introductions

Thurs, Jan 26: Introductions

Week 2: Situating Ourselves and Beginning to Frame a Topic

Tues, Jan 29:

Assigned: Blogpost 1: Finding your voice: Who am I as an American Studies researcher and what kind of research do I want to do?

Assigned: Bring to the next class a typewritten 1-sentence title of your provisional research topic, a paragraph describing why you are leaning toward that topic, a list of things (in the form of bullet points) that you know about the topic right now, and 1 or 2 extra sheets of paper.

Thurs, Jan 31:
Due: Provisional research topics for discussion in class

Week 3: Research and Topic Development

Tues, Feb 5: Topic selection and brainstorming workshop.
Readings: Mary George, Elements of Library Research, 1-63; Bruce Ballenger, The Curious Researcher, 23-49.

Due: Blogpost 1

Assigned: Blogpost 2: Presentation/discussion of Research Questions

Thurs, Feb 7: Research tactics
Readings: George, Elements of Library Research, 64-89; Ballenger, Curious Researcher, 51-68.

Assigned: Research Worksheet I

Week 4: Potential Themes: Identity and Inequality

Tues, Feb 12:

Thurs, Feb 14:
Readings:
Assigned: Revised and Refined Research Questions

Week 5: Conferences and Research Questions

Tues, Feb 19: No Class: Individual Conferences I.

Bring: Research Worksheet I, Revised and Refined Research Questions, Research Log, and Blogpost 2

Due: Blogpost 2

Assigned: Blogpost 3 (Peer Reviews of Blogpost 2)

Thurs, Feb 21: Research workshop
Reading: George, Elements of Library Research, 90-125; Ballenger, Curious Researcher, 68-84.

Assigned: Research Worksheet II and III

Due: Revised and Refined Research Questions
Due: 1-page response paper on a reading from last week.

Week 6: Visual Culture and Textual Analysis

Tues, Feb 26:

Assigned: Presentation/ Discussion of Research Question(s)

Due: Blogpost 3 (Peer Reviews of Blogpost 2)

Thurs, Feb 28:

Assigned: Blogpost 4: Annotated bibliography of key primary and secondary sources
Week 7: Oral Histories

Tues, Mar 5:

Assigned: Blogpost 5: Sources/Methods Exercise

Due: 1-page response paper on a reading from last week

Sign up for second round of conferences

Thurs, Mar 7:

Week 8: More Research Techniques

Tues, Mar 12:
Reading: George, Elements of Library Research, 126-144; Ballenger, Curious Researcher, 100-141.

Due: Blogpost 4: Literature Review

Sign-up for research presentations

Thurs, Mar 14: No Class: Individual Meetings II.
Bring: Worksheet II, Blogpost 5: Sources/Methods Exercise (If possible), Research Log, and Worksheet III (if you've made progress on it).

Week 9
Spring Break, No class 3/19 or 3/21

Week 10: History, Textual Research, and the Archive

Tues, Mar 26:
Reading: Mary Dudziak, Cold War Civil Rights, 115-151, 282-291.

Due: Blogpost 5: Sources/Methods Exercise

Assigned: Blogpost 6: Peer Review of Sources/Methods (Blogpost 5)

Thurs, Mar 28:
Week 11: Material Culture and Cultural Landscapes

Tues, Apr 2:

Due: Blogpost 6: Peer Review of Sources/Methods (Blogpost 5)

Thurs, Apr 4: Survey Workshop

Assigned: Blogpost 7: Draft of your Entire Proposal

Assigned: How is my project interdisciplinary? worksheet.

Due: 1-page response paper on a reading from last week.

Week 12: Shaping Your Project: Interdisciplinarity

Tues, Apr 9: Workshop: How is my project interdisciplinary?

Assigned: How will I analyze my data?

Due: How is my project interdisciplinary worksheet.

Thurs, Apr 11: No Class

Week 13: Thinking about Method

Tues, Apr 16: Workshop: What is my method of analysis?

Assigned: Worksheet on Analytical Reasoning and Research Methods

Due: How will I analyze my data?

Thurs, Apr 18: No Class

Due: Blogpost 7: Complete draft of research proposal to be posted on elms.

Assigned: Blogpost 8: Peer review of two student drafts.

Sign up for 3rd round of conferences

Week 14: No Meetings – Keep Working

Tues, Apr 23: No Class
Assigned: Guidelines for Oral Presentations

Due: Analytical Reasoning and Research Methods Worksheet

Thurs, Apr 25: No Class

Due: Blogpost 8: Peer reviews of proposal drafts

**Week 15: Meetings and Presentations**

Tues, Apr 30: No Class: Individual Meetings III.
Bring Proposal Draft, Peer Critiques, Research Log, and Blogpost 6

Thurs, May 2:
Research Proposal Presentations I

**Week 16: Presentations Continued**

Tues, May 7: Research Proposal Presentations II

Thurs, May 9: Research Proposal Presentations III

FINAL Exam period: Research Proposal Presentations IV

Due: Final Proposals and Research Logs

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

AMST 340 is the seminar for AMST majors in which students study research frameworks and methods and draft the proposal for their senior Capstone Project. It is a reading and writing intensive course.

**Participate in collaborative learning.** A seminar is a collaborative and cooperative enterprise! Students share responsibility for producing innovative and high quality discussions and presenting the results of their research and thinking in workshops. Most of you are nearing the end of your undergraduate careers. You have acquired good skills and substantial knowledge about certain facets of American culture. We will hope to take advantage of your knowledge and experience in building seminar discussions and a lively class blog. We will work hard to create the kind of learning community that fosters dialogue among students and between students and instructor. Dialogue helps create the kind of engaged critical thinking that leads to good research, lively writing, and the kinds of substantive discussions that can change our thinking about what it means to be an American Studies researcher and how we are thinking about our topics.

**Maintain a respectful classroom environment.** In American Studies we discuss sensitive issues dealing with race, sexuality, gender, class, power, and structural inequality in our society. It is important to create an environment where everyone feels able to contribute ideas and different perspectives on the issues. Disrespectful remarks made to your fellow students or to the professor or teaching assistant are not appropriate. Because we engage in regular peer review of your project
ideas, we need your astute but generous and constructive participation and critique. Our goal will be to encourage each participant's independent thinking and to craft a class environment that enables each student to discover and articulate his or her best insights.

**Attend each class.** In a seminar, we can't manage without your daily participation, so you need to be in class every day we meet. Students are graded on participation in every class session. If you experience illness or emergencies, email me or Anna prior to class. If you are absent more than one day due to illness, you must bring documentation signed by a health care professional. In addition, if you are ill on days when assignments are due, be sure to notify the professor in advance, and upon returning to class, bring documentation of the illness, signed by a health care professional. Religious holidays are excused absences, but please give prior notice. Participation in official university athletic events will be an excused absence when the student notifies the professor in advance and produces documentation from the athletic program of the need to participate in events.

**Keep up with the readings and be prepared to discuss them.** PLEASE bring readings with you to class. These form a large part of the substance of our seminar (your research ideas provide the rest). I have selected the readings and viewings for one or more of three purposes: 1) showcase key concepts or theories in American studies, 2) learn how to do some basic research methods, and 3) help you learn step by step how to make both library and online searching for sources more efficient and effective. The success (and everyone's enjoyment) of our discussions will depend on your willingness to complete the reading assignments on time and to contribute your insights about them. Please read actively, record your impressions, mark interesting or irritating passages; engage with the authors, and come to class ready to contribute at least one good comment and two good questions about their work and the issues they raise.

**Prepare response papers/homework assignments and bring them to class:** There will be homework assignments connected to the readings for many classes in which readings are assigned. Homework Assignments will be posted on Discussion Board roughly 2-4 days in advance of the class. Students will be asked to read or speak from their homework papers in class and to hand them in at the end of class. On occasion, the instructor may substitute an in-class quiz on the readings.

**Volunteer to help shape class discussions for Extra Credit:** Students may sign up to help lead the discussion for each set of readings or viewings. If you opt to do this, your job is to “teach to the texts”. Shape your discussion or activities to help the class grasp the key concepts in each set of readings, illustrate them—perhaps through an experience of your own or a short video clip or news article—and get students talking about them. You may prepare a handout with discussion questions if you’d like—bring enough copies for everyone. If you sign up to lead discussion, please check in with myself and Anna so that we can coordinate our planning for the class.

**Develop a Capstone Project proposal that you care about:** By the end of AMST 340, each student will produce a polished, formal research proposal for the Senior Capstone Project, to be completed in AMST 450, the Senior Seminar, or for an Honors Thesis. The proposal will be organized into specific sections, according to a standard template. Blog posts, research exercises, conferences, and peer feedback will all be designed to help you develop and refine the components of your research proposal. At the end of the semester, each student will give a formal presentation
of the proposal to the class for additional feedback and comment. Each presentation must include a visual and/or audio component using whatever software or app best suits your material: Powerpoint, Prezi, Camtasia, DVD clips, etc.

Proofread your proposal drafts. Failure to proofread and spellcheck projects and presentations will cause the instructor immense frustration, and will undoubtedly have adverse repercussions for your grades.

**Keep up with your Research Log, Research Exercises, and Worksheets:** There will be several short assignments over the course of the semester related to the Capstone Research Proposal. First and foremost, I will ask you to maintain a **research log** (see Elements of Library Research, 32-36) in which you record the steps you have taken in your library and online research, to be brought to conferences and turned in by the final due date along with your formal proposal. Second will be a series of worksheets created to get you to practice skills using the library and the Web to find high quality sources on your topic and to think through your research proposal. Third will be tasks aimed at getting you to focus and refine the main components of your research proposal. Try to be a good sport about these; they are an important part of the learn-by-doing design of the course, and they will help the proposal to write itself, so to speak!

Come prepared to conferences: Each student will schedule three office hour meetings with the professor during the semester. These are posted on the class calendar and we will use class time to conduct them. These conferences will focus on your progress developing your capstone proposal. Prior to each meeting, you will be asked to complete research exercises which we can look at together to assess how your project is coming along and what issues you need help with. Take advantage of these opportunities—a lot of good work gets done in conferences.

**Meet your deadlines to post sections of your proposal in your Blog:** Each of us will maintain a blog in AMST 340 this semester. We will use the blogs to draft and think about various required parts of your capstone project proposals. Your blog will also serve as a platform for peer feedback about your project as you work on it. I will post specific assignments for blogposts on my blog and you can expect to post 8 entries plus additional comments over the course of the semester.

Practice the art of effective Peer Review and feedback. At various points in the semester, you will be asked to provide peer review and feedback about each others' projects. We will do this in a systematic way through the comment mechanism on everyone's personal blog as well as through workshops in class or homework. A draft of the entire proposal will be due on April 19th, and students will provide a formal critique of two proposals using a set of guidelines I will provide. Students may earn extra credit by making additional high quality peer review posts to the blogs.

Ask for help if you need it. **My goal is to help every student succeed in AMST 340 and to produce a capstone project proposal you are excited about and proud of.** You are welcome to email me, or make office hour appointments at any time. Let me know how I can help.
Grading
Grades will be calculated roughly as follows:

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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Exercises, Conferences, Short Papers</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blog Posts, Including peer reviews</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Proposal</td>
<td>30%</td>
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Please note: Students are not competing for a limited number of good grades.

Additional Policies
Monitor your ELMS page and email: Because I will communicate frequently via email sent from ELMS and announcements on ELMS, everyone needs to monitor their email and our class site daily. **Students are responsible for checking their UMD email regularly or making arrangements to have your UMD mail forwarded to an email account you actually read. The instructor will not be responsible for missed messages sent via Canvas or posted on ELMS.**

Gadgetry
Silence and put away cell phones, handhelds, gadgets that distract you and/or make noise: Do use the minute or two when we are getting settled to check sports scores, read email, or text, but once class starts, silence your gadgets and put them away. When cell phones or pagers ring, or when you check the sports scores or text messages under the table, like nobody sees you, it disrupts the class. We will help each other survive this deprivation by conducting scintillating class discussions and workshops. The only exception to this policy is when everyone’s devices activate simultaneously because of the University’s emergency notification system. When this occurs, students may consult their devices to determine if a university emergency exists. If that is not the case, the devices should be immediately returned to silent mode and put away.

**Laptops**, on the other hand, are welcome, so long as you are using them to stay involved in the class, taking notes, viewing readings we are discussing, etc. If you cannot manage this, don't power up. Those with laptops will inevitably be asked to google things we are discussing in class. If you're caught on FB, ESPN, or any other site not course-related, it's an F for the day. If you cannot comply with these restrictions, I reserve the right to ban laptops from class as many American Studies professors are now doing.

Late work will receive a lower grade. It is the student's responsibility to get projects completed and posted or turned in in advance of the deadlines. Be sure to give yourself adequate time for solving technical problems and working around the occasional system crash. And, while we're on that subject, remember to save frequently and back up your work. Expect no mercy if you don't.

Code of Academic Integrity: All students enrolled in AMST 340 are expected to abide by the Student Honor Council's Code of Academic Integrity which can be found here: http://www.shc.umd.edu/whatis.html. Academic dishonesty (cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism) will not be tolerated. The definitions for these offenses are
posted on the website just listed and we urge you to familiarize yourselves with them. "Academic dishonesty is a serious offense which may result in suspension or expulsion from the university."

**Students with disabilities:** Please identify yourselves early in the semester so that we can make appropriate arrangements through the Office of Disability Support Services.

**Scholar athletes:** Please identify yourselves early in the semester and present a schedule of times you are required to be away from campus and will miss class. It is your responsibility to turn in assignments on time and to make up missed exercises or activities.

This syllabus may be subject to change. Students will be notified in advance of important changes and I will try not to change due dates.

All the best for a productive and successful semester,

Rob