

SEMINAR IN THEORY AND METHOD OF AMERICAN STUDIES

AMST 350

Spring 2004

Tuesdays 4:00-6:45

EC-11

Wayne Hobson

Course website:

hss.fullerton.edu/amst/courses/wh-amst350.htm

Office Hours:

Honors Office (PLN-120): Drop in any time

AMST Office (EC-612): Tue. 3:00-4:00, or by appt.

Messages:

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(Subject: AMST 350)

Required Texts:

 (available at **Little Professor Book Center**, 725 Placentia Ave., Fullerton)

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*

William Strunk, Jr. & E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 4th ed.

Reprint Booklets Available at CSUF Library Reserve Book Room (Circulation Desk):

Essays on American Studies Theory and Method

Essays on American Cultural Diversity

About the course:

The aim of this class is to help you better understand the assumptions, methods, and techniques of cultural analysis utilized in American Studies scholarship. Our discipline focuses on the analysis of historical and contemporary American cultural texts (broadly construed). In this course we will be emphasizing the conceptual rather than the content bases of the discipline. You will get a lot of “hands on” experience with cultural analysis and you will get a lot of personal attention and assistance in your work. To succeed in this class you must be an active learner, not only coming to class regularly, but preparing ahead of time, keeping to the assignment schedule, and participating actively in the discussion and other work of our class sessions. Best wishes for a good semester!

When you earn a grade of C or better in this class, you will have satisfied the University's Upper Division Writing Requirement.

Learning Goals:

- Develop and refine your skills of cultural analysis, synthesis, and interpretation
- Introduce you to the American Studies community beyond this university: programs on other campuses and the history and self-concept of the American Studies movement
- Strengthen and refine your understanding of the culture concept so that you can apply it critically and creatively
- Help you learn and apply common methods of historical and contemporary research utilized in American Studies scholarship
- Increase your ability to judge the soundness of particular American culture studies and to measure excellence in research and writing
- Sharpen your understanding and analysis of key issues in the conceptualization and study of cultural diversity and pluralism in American society and in American Studies scholarship

Assignments and Assessment:

You are expected to read, reflect, discuss, write, and rewrite throughout the semester. There will be two in class midterm examinations, and three medium-length essays requiring independent research, analysis and synthesis. Separate handouts will describe these assignments. You may also download them from the course website. **Class attendance and participation are required** and will be important factors in your grade. As part of this requirement, you are asked to submit either a short response/evaluation essay or written discussion questions on assigned readings for each class session that has assigned reading (a handout will describe this assignment in detail).

Assessment in this course will gauge your ability to think critically, to use relevant bibliographic resources, to analyze primary documents for their meaning and secondary sources for their arguments and their methodology, to analyze and synthesize materials, and to create informed and thoughtful written and oral arguments which are clearly based on the evidence you have collected. You can expect to receive timely, constructive written comments on your work throughout the semester.

In Class Midterm Exams (two) Mar. 9 & May 4	30%	<u>Grading Scale:</u>
American Studies on the Internet Assignment due Feb. 23	10%	A = 90-100
Ethnography Research & Analysis Essay due Mar. 23	15%	B = 80- 89
Cultural Text Research & Analysis Essay due May 25	15%	C = 65- 79
Response and Evaluation Papers (two)	10%	D = 50- 64
Class Participation, Presentations & Discussion Questions	20%	

Discussion Topics and Reading Assignments:

I. "CULTURE" AND THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN STUDIES MOVEMENT

NOTE: ESSAYS FOR THE FIRST TWO SECTIONS ARE IN THE *ESSAYS ON AMERICAN STUDIES THEORY AND METHOD* REPRINT BOOKLET, AVAILABLE ON REQUEST AT THE LIBRARY'S CIRCULATION DESK

- Feb. 3 Our Purposes and Procedures; What is American Studies?**
Methods: Exploring American Studies Programs on the Internet
- 10 The American Studies Movement: History, Goals, Rewards, Challenges**
Methods: Internet Sites as Sources for American Studies Research
Reading Assignment:
Kerber, "Diversity and Transformation of American Studies"
Lipsitz, "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory and American Studies"
- 17 Webs of Significance and Patterns of Meaning: An Influential Version of the Culture Concept**
Methods: Using Quotes and Documenting Sources
Reading Assignment:
Lystra, "Clifford Geertz and the Concept of Culture"
Sewell, "Geertz, Cultural Systems, and History: From Synchrony to Transformation"

American Studies on the Internet Essay -- Due February 23 (Monday)

II. STUDYING AMERICAN CULTURE VIA ETHNOGRAPHY

Feb. 24 Objectivity or Subjectivity? Detached Documentation or Committed Social Criticism? Evaluating the Stance of the Ethnographer

Methods: Practical Guide to Fieldwork—Observation and Narration

Reading Assignment:

Rosaldo, “Subjectivity in Social Analysis”

Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down.*, chapters to be assigned

Mar. 2 Understanding the Collision of Cultures and Considering the Problem of Generalizing from a Case Study

Reading Assignment:

Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down.*, chapters to be assigned

9 First Midterm Examination

16 Methods: Effective Writing – Usage, Composition, Clarity, Power, Precision

Reading Assignment:

Strunk & White, *The Elements of Style*, entire

Assignment for Groups 1 & 2:

Bring to class: first page of your ethnography essay—copies for everyone

Ethnography Essay -- Due March 23 (Tuesday), beginning of class

III. CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND AMERICAN CULTURE STUDIES

NOTE: ALL READINGS IN THE SECTION ARE IN THE *ESSAYS ON AMERICAN CULTURAL DIVERSITY* REPRINT BOOKLET, AVAILABLE ON REQUEST AT THE LIBRARY’S CIRCULATION DESK

March 23 Explanation of Cultural Text Research Assignment

“Lone Star” (video shown in class)

SPRING BREAK

April 6 Shifting Approaches to American Cultural Diversity

Methods: Using Online Indexes and Abstracts

Reading Assignment:

Levine, “Explanations”

Gutiérrez, “Community, Patriarchy and Individualism: The Politics of Chicano History and the Dream of Equality”

Cultural Text Research Annotated Bibliography Due April 13 (Tuesday), beginning of class

- April 13 Victimization, Hegemony, and Agency: Case Studies**
Reading Assignment:
Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860”
Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America”
- 20 Diversity, Appropriation, and Agency: Case Studies**
Reading Assignment:
Cohen, “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s”
Kelley, “The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics during World War II”
- 27 Diversity and Identity: Multiple/Elective Identities; When “the Other” Talks Back**
Reading Assignment:
Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture”
hooks, “Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination”
- May 4 Second Midterm Examination**
- 11 & 18 Cultural Text Research Presentations**
Group Presentations in Class
- 18 Methods: Effective Writing and the Joy of Revision – Usage, Composition, Clarity, Power, Precision**
Reading Assignment:
Strunk & White, *The Elements of Style*, entire (review)
Assignment for Group 3 & 4:
Bring to class: first page of your cultural text research essay—copies for everyone

Cultural Text Research Essay -- Due May 25 (Tuesday)