

GEOC Program Plan for Information Literacy

Major Program: American Studies

Information Literacy: *the ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand.* (<http://www.infolit.org/>)

Statement of Principles regarding interdisciplinary learning:

1. In order to succeed in their major, American Studies students are required to absorb and put to use the key elements of information literacy in ways that differ in some regards from those that apply in disciplinary majors. American Studies students take most of their advanced course work in a variety of disciplines, including history, English, political science, anthropology, women's studies, modern languages, and art history. In each individual case, the choice of actual courses from the approved lists is determined by reference to a student's central research agenda. The main "track" of their work, chosen from among the four main options (see Catalog), promotes the integration of a variety of disciplinary perspectives around a core of questions concerning history, institutions, culture, art, and language in various New World societies. Drawing from different perspectives provides rich and essential information. But it provides more. **A student must work hard to understand not only the typical informational content and venues of courses in the chosen fields, but also the intellectual assumptions underpinning the different fields as well as their various historical backgrounds.** They become familiar with the dominant research paradigms in each field, but by interrogating the intersections and divergences among these fields--as those intersections and divergences emerge in the light of common research problems arising in the advanced study of American issues--they learn about the structure of knowledge in the modern world.

2. Because students work not only within these various disciplines but also between them, to succeed in the major they also must become adept at **integrating these various assumptions and paradigms.** In particular, as they advance they are encouraged to actively explore cross-fertilizations between different bodies of knowledge and the intellectual traditions they reflect and embody. The farthest goal of the major is to make our students think about styles of knowing, the contexts out of which they have arisen, the cultural and historical assumptions they reflect, and the manner in which their interaction may promote positive change in the constituent fields.

Information Literacy in American Studies:

The American Studies Program introduces students to disciplinary knowledge and interdisciplinary research methods by a capstone course that is taught within the program itself:

INTD/ENGL 265W (Seminar in American Studies) is the required capstone course for the major. Students are expected to take it in the spring semester of their senior year. This course, centered on a complex interdisciplinary topic (for instance, in 2006, "Memory and the American

Revolution”; in 2007, “Landscape in American Culture”), is intended to hone students' skills in following sophisticated questions across traditional disciplinary boundaries. How well a student understands the intellectual assumptions and traditions of constituent fields and how well s/he integrates them in the research paper are definitive issues in evaluating the research project.

This course fulfills both the Information Literacy and the Writing in the Major requirements for the American Studies major. It is also open to students in other majors, for whom it may fulfill either the "W" requirement or the Information Literacy requirement (for English majors, for instance, it may fulfill both; literary study is always one of the constituent fields drawn on for the design of INTD/ENGL 265W). In this capstone course, students exercise sophisticated reading, writing, and technological skills by consulting with the professor and fellow students. This work guides the student in developing an annotated bibliography, surveying archival holdings when appropriate, participating in relevant group projects, analyzing research websites and databases, and attending library instruction sessions and workshops. The capstone course culminates in the production of a lengthy research paper.

Given its close ties to the English department, within which it is located, American Studies naturally enough follows a set of assumptions similar to those that guide the Information Literacy requirement for English majors. In particular, the capstone course in American Studies adheres to the following key standards in Information Literacy as defined in the Association of College and Research Libraries' “Faculty Guidelines: Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education.”

Standard One

“The information-literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.” In the capstone course, the students are assigned to write a research paper of 15-20 pages using critical methodologies specific to the array of disciplines embraced by any given version of the course. Students learn to interrogate their chosen topic so as to generate the questions that need to be asked and answered in the course of their research. Creating annotated bibliographies gives students an appreciation of the wide varieties of scholarly discussion throughout historical periods. In developing their research products, they learn to identify and access information from primary texts and from secondary sources pertinent to cultural analysis (for example, source-studies, interviews, scholarly databases, archival papers, and so forth).

Standard Two

“The information-literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.” In the capstone courses, American Studies majors will be trained in advanced research methods in cultural studies, including the use of a variety of scholarly books and journals covering the constituent fields (in either print or electronic format), specialized internet search engines, and electronic databases (for example, the MLA Bibliography, America: History and Life, Evans Early American Imprints, Early American Newspapers, Archives USA, LexisNexis Academic, and so forth). They will also attend library workshops and information sessions that explore the development and structure of scholarly information.

Standard Three

“The information-literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his/her knowledge base and value system.” In the American Studies capstone course, all students are assigned secondary reading as well as the primary texts; they may also be expected to evaluate each other’s writing assignments through such venues as WebCT/Vista. Exploring relevant primary and secondary sources may require using ILL, archival sources, interviews, and so forth. Majors learn to evaluate the argument of scholarly articles and books in a variety of fields; validate the generating questions that are an argument’s foundation; assess the logical process that leads to the argument’s conclusions; and examine the argument’s rhetoric to discover political and cultural biases, contradictions, and gaps in the argument. They also consider ways of applying newly incorporated information in the construction and completion of interdisciplinary research projects.

Standard Four

“The information-literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.” In the American Studies capstone course, students learn the research process by pursuing research projects as noted above (see Standard One). Throughout the research process, students will be aware of the needs and purposes of their audience. They learn to narrow the scope of their research topic, formulate a viable thesis, organize their argument, and in addressing a scholarly reader, produce a paper that contributes to a specific debate. As they evaluate previous scholarly work on their topic, they learn to discover how their understanding of and approach toward a given research problems may differ from prevailing views.

Standard Five

“The information-literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.” The American Studies capstone course emphasizes rigorously ethical research; the principles of academic honesty are prominent in each course. Part of the research assignment is to learn the proper method of citation for constituent fields (MLA, APA, or The Chicago Manual of Style). In this way, the American Studies major learns that acknowledging earlier sources not only gives credit to other scholars but also furthers the historical and/or critical debate.