

# **Disciplinary Communication in *American Studies***

[Draft]

## **I. Educational objectives**

American Studies is currently revising its undergraduate curriculum. We envision a four-course series of foundation courses required of all majors as a key element of the new curriculum. These foundation courses will be restricted to majors. They will give students the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological tools necessary for analyzing the United States in an interdisciplinary fashion. The American Studies Department also recognizes that facility with different modes of presentation and interpretation are essential to successfully carrying out interdisciplinary research. The development of excellent communication skills will be an important component of these foundation courses, and we plan to build any campus disciplinary communications requirement into the curriculum at this level. Communication skills will be further developed in our capstone seminar (AS 190).

Note on resources: Building a successful disciplinary communication component into these foundation courses will require us to have access to graduate teaching assistants who are sufficiently trained in the teaching of writing. This means that future TA allocations for American Studies (which does not have a graduate program) would have to be generous enough for us to cover our large lectures and still have approximately six positions left over to help staff these writing-intensive courses.

### ***Writing***

Students learn to

1. use the writing conventions of American studies, including the organization of ideas, argumentation, citation, and style.
2. interpret different kinds of primary sources and develop arguments that build from synthesizing analyses of both primary and secondary sources.
3. assess and bring the insights of scholarship from different disciplines to bear on social or cultural phenomena.
4. develop a viable research question and the ability to present a sustained and careful answer to the question.
5. use revisions as a means of sharpening analysis.

### ***Speaking/presentation***

Although we do not emphasize detailed training in modes of oral presentation, most American studies courses use an interactive pedagogical approach, with participation expected of all students. Moreover, many of our courses, especially at the foundation level, require individual and/or group presentations of course readings, student research, or both.

## **II. How the educational objectives are met in the curriculum**

### **List of course(s) committed to disciplinary communications objectives**

The following foundation courses will be required of all majors and will serve the disciplinary objectives described above.

**AS 100 – Key Concepts in American Studies:** Provides majors with an in-depth introduction to the history and current state of American studies, to key concepts used in the field, and to the major at UCSC. Through readings of exemplary scholarly work and a series of short (3-page) expository writing assignments, the course familiarizes students with the writing conventions of American studies, including the organization of ideas, argumentation, citation, and style. The papers will be evenly distributed over the course of the quarter. Students will revise at least two of these papers.

**AS 101 – Power, Identity, and Social Formations:** Explores key foundational texts (theoretical and applied) pertaining to major social/identity categories like race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality. Provides significant attention to their social constructedness as well as their intersections and mutual articulations. Writing assignments require students to assess scholarship from different disciplines and bring their insights to bear on social or cultural phenomena.

**AS 102 – Reading Culture:** Introduces students to the central role of studies of culture in American studies. Surveys different definitions of culture, as well as the ways that the study of culture has changed during the development of American studies as a field. Familiarizes students with major theorists whose ideas are used to analyze culture, examines how other scholars have applied their work, and encourages students to engage theoretical and applied works when analyzing the cultural texts they consume. Writing assignments emphasize the interpretation of primary cultural texts.

**AS 103 – American Studies Approaches to History:** A two-quarter overview of US history that showcases the interdisciplinary approach of American studies. Demonstrates the breadth of the American studies approach by analyzing different types of primary texts (e.g., novels, court decisions, oral histories, popular songs, films, etc.) and by reading secondary sources grounded in different methods and disciplines. Short written assignments for this course will help students learn to interpret different kinds of primary sources and develop arguments that build from readings of both primary and secondary sources. Students conclude each quarter with a short research paper. In preparation for this paper, the instructor addresses the challenges of developing a viable research topic and requires the submission of a précis.

**AS 190 –Interdisciplinary Research Seminar:** Students produce in this class a 15-20-page research paper in their chosen area of emphasis in the major. Class readings are minimal, focusing on what is at stake in interdisciplinary research and on how to write an effective paper. Most class energies are dedicated to a series of workshops that move

students' papers from a précis to the final version. Students will receive feedback on and be expected to revise the paper's introduction. Later in the quarter, they will receive feedback on and be expected to revise a draft of the entire essay. Students will be expected to use all disciplinary communication skills learned in the foundation courses.