

STETSON UNIVERSITY  
Department of American Studies

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AS 497  
Sampson 218

Preparation for Senior Research

Course Description:

This course provides the groundwork for the Senior Research project, which is to be completed during the Spring Semester. Because this course is the culmination of your undergraduate career, there will be an emphasis on consolidating the knowledge and skills that each student has been learning over the last few years, and on using that pool of learning to identify a research topic and construct a prospectus and bibliography of the senior research paper itself. To achieve these goals, we will meet as a group weekly during the first few weeks of the semester, before turning to individual meetings to discuss your progress on your research; then we will meet again to compare notes on progress made during the semester and on plans for the next.

Course Goals:

Skills and knowledge:

- To refine a clear analytical style of writing
- To learn from diverse aspects of American culture

Methodological training:

- To expose students the methodologies of cultural evaluation and interdisciplinary study
- To provide an overview of the evolution of American studies

Writing the senior research prospectus:

- To identify a research topic
- To gather and read secondary sources that will ground the topic
- To make progress on the initial stages of primary research
- To explore your topic from multiple points of view as you articulate your thesis
- To write a senior research prospectus with a bibliography of completed and planned research
- To have fun exploring a topic that genuinely interests you!

Readings:

Fox and Lears, eds., *The Power of Culture*  
Selections from American Quarterly  
your research materials

Recommended reading:

David Beasley, How to Use a Research Library  
Howard Becker, Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It  
The Chicago Manual of Style  
Jon Furberg and Richard Hopkins, College Style Sheet.  
Natalie Goldberg, Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within  
Laurie Kirszner and Stephen Mandell, The Brief Handbook, fourth edition.  
Thomas Mann, A Guide to Library Research Methods.  
William Zinsser, On Writing Well

### Recommended things to do:

As you read other people's work, look for things to learn, but also for how they write  
Ask yourself how to make use of interdisciplinary thinking in understanding the reading and in constructing your thesis  
Use encyclopedias to gain an overview of your topic  
Follow leads in footnotes and by browsing widely  
Look up sources using web-based and library-based research tools  
Make use of interlibrary loans, and order early, since this can take some time  
Use book reviews to understand books and whole fields of research  
Include a variety of sources to learn from different kinds of writing, each of which has different purposes

### Schedule:

#### *Overview*

week 1: evaluating culture, using Fox and Lears, Introduction

#### *Interdisciplinary Study and American Studies*

week 2: the evolution of American studies, using Gene Wise, "'Paradigm Dramas' in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement" *American Quarterly* 31 (1979): 293-337.

week 3: the multicultural turn, using Cathy Davidson, "'Loose Change': Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 4, 1993" *American Quarterly* 46 (June 1994): 123-38

Students to alternate leading discussion and participating

-each student for each day to submit a two-page summary-of-argument paper

#### *Case Studies*

weeks 4-6: method and content of cultural analysis using 3 chapters from Fox and Lears

Students to alternate leading discussion and participating

-students leading discussion will introduce the reading with a 10-minute presentation

-each student for each day will submit a two-page summary-of-argument paper

#### *Building the Thesis*

weeks 7- 8: reading toward research

Each student to find readings in *American Quarterly* related to your emerging research, lead discussion about it, and write a two-page summary-of-argument paper

by Nov. 3: topic, thesis, "following of leads" (in footnotes and encyclopedias), and bibliography of secondary sources, with annotations on the significance of each work for your purposes: turn in four typed pages

by Nov. 17: primary sources and point of view: turn in one typed page of sources and one typed page on your point of view in relation to the sources you have researched

Dec. 1: presentation of research: showcasing what has been learned and what is to be done

Dec. 8: prospectus and planning: turn in 10-page paper expressing thesis, description of how you will explain it, and some reference to the work still to be done, along with an expanded bibliography