Greetings from the American Studies Program

I write this at the end of a fall quarter unlike any other. I hope this finds you well during these difficult times.

The pandemic has meant that we are connecting with each other over Zoom instead of in person. While we’ve had to put live events on hold, community is still the heart of the Program, so I’m happy that our majors are finding ways to engage with each other despite physical distance. It is a real pleasure to work with such exceptional undergraduate students, and to help them delve into topics and questions meaningful to them by bringing interdisciplinary approaches into conversation. We hosted a stimulating virtual discussion just before the 2020 election with former Program director Carl Smith and alumna Amanda Litman ’12 who co-founded the organization Run for Something after working for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign. And we are lucky to have three wonderful faculty collaborating for this year’s introductory seminar series, Peoples, Nations, and Worlds: Mérida Rua (Latina and Latino Studies) in fall quarter, Michael Allen (History) in winter, and Ivy Wilson (English) in spring.

We are thrilled to welcome Nicolette Bruner as an Assistant Professor of Instruction jointly appointed with Legal Studies. Bruner received her Ph.D. in English and her J.D. from the University of Michigan. Her book project, Thing People: Living with Corporations and Other Nonhumans, applies her training in corporate law, jurisprudence, and legal history to the literary and cultural study of the nonhuman. She has extensive teaching experience, and her classes will be a wonderful addition to the Program.

The Program’s staffing has undergone some restructuring. Program Assistant Imani McPhaden has left to pursue other opportunities, but we are fortunate for a wonderful support team—Tom Burke, Janet Hundrieser, Jill Mannor, and Megan Skord—in a new constellation with Kaplan Humanities Institute and Science in Human Culture.

My hope for this year is that we join together and support each other as we work to better understand the forces, processes, and histories that are shaping our current moment. We are living through great turmoil in the nation and the world as we confront three intersecting crises—COVID, the scourge of racism, and the climate emergency. All are linked by inequalities that put certain communities in greater danger than others. Such connections make clearer than ever the importance of an interdisciplinary program like American Studies that fundamentally considers diverse groups in relation to each other and to society at large. American Studies students are in a unique position to apply their comparative and transnational training—along with the creative thinking and flexibility developed from navigating between disciplines—to help better understand the role of the U.S. and its peoples, historically and today, in all three crises.

We look forward to this academic year and many to follow! We hope you’ll stay in touch.
This past year the projects produced by the senior seminar’s stellar students made clear, as they always do, the value of our deep commitment to a liberal arts education within a research university.

**Gabrielle Grossman**
*Eat Your Veggies and Other Ways to Save the World: On the Cooperative Social Activism of the Jewish Vegetarians of North America*

**Advisor:** Keith Woodhouse (History)

**Zoe Johnson**
*“Germinate:” A Theatrical Interrogation of 21st Century Vaccine Hesitancy*

**Advisor:** Cristina L.H. Traina (Religious Studies)

**Hannah Lachow**
*Double Edged Disclosure: A Qualitative Analysis of How Female Friendship Influences Body Image*

**Advisor:** Allysa Levy Chung (Psychology)

**William Paik**
*The Alt-Right in Berkeley: How the Alt-Right Engage the Public Through Celebrity*

**Advisor:** Ji-Yeon Yuh (History)
Ruby Phillips
The Loving Project: A Creative Analysis of Interracial Love
Advisor: Cheryl Judice (School of Education and Social Policy)

Amos Pomp
Institutional Logics of Inclusion in Outdoor Adventure Programming: A Case Study of Organizational Conflict
Advisor: Simone Ispa-Landa (School of Education and Social Policy)

Meilynn Shi
Physicians on the Picket Line: A Case Study of the 1975 HSA Strike at Cook County Hospital
Advisor: Mark Sheldon (Philosophy)

Jon Wolf
The Great Fact Was the Land Itself: Poems And Stories
Advisor: Averill Curdy (English)
In conjunction with Professor Amy Partridge’s winter 2020 course, Reproductive Health/Politics/Justice, American Studies hosted an outing to see a production of Roe at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. A pre-event discussion of topics relevant to the 1973 Roe v. Wade case was held at a nearby restaurant with American Studies majors and students in the Gender and Sexuality Studies Program who attended the play.

- Jay Rosen American Studies Scholarship
  Mara Kelly

- Phi Beta Kappa
  Keerti Gopal
  Gabrielle Grossman
  Mara Kelly
  Hannah Lachow
  William Paik
  Amos Pomp
  Meilynn Shi

- Carl Smith Prize for Outstanding Student Essay in American Studies
  Hannah Lachow
  Double-Edged Disclosure: A Qualitative Analysis of How Female Friendship Influences Body Image

  Amos Pomp
  Institutional Logics of Inclusion in Outdoor Adventure Programming: A Case Study of Organizational Conflict
Current Majors

Class of 2021

Claire Corridon
Claire, a double major in Political Science, is writing her senior thesis on intergenerational contemporary feminist art, race, and futurity.

Sam Gardner
Sam’s concentration is on Economics and History. He is writing his senior thesis on the use of alternative data in the U.S. consumer credit market.

Keerti Gopal
Keerti’s concentration is on social movements and societal change, with a particular focus on climate justice and youth activism. She is minoring in Creative Writing.

Vivien Hough
Vivien is minoring in Business Institutions. She is writing her senior thesis on the role of the media in constructing notions of Black criminality in the 1980s.

Mara Kelly
Mara double majors in Religious Studies with a concentration in Religion, Law, and Politics. Her senior thesis looks at the 2010 “Ground Zero Mosque” controversy as a case study of how right-wing ideas are amplified in mainstream media.

Danielle Kosover
Dani’s concentration is on African American and Latinx Studies, with a particular focus on race-making within the U.S. and Latin America. They are minoring in Spanish.

Matthew Marth
Matt, a Legal Studies double major, is interested in urban history, housing policy, and what people do together when they aren’t working. He is writing his senior thesis on the history of community facilities in public housing in Chicago.

Julia Tarnow
Julia is pursuing a minor in Environmental Policy and Culture and a certificate from the Institute for Sustainability at Northwestern (ISEN). She is currently writing her thesis on questioning the true sustainability of sustainable fashion.
Class of 2022

Margot Bartol
Margot is an Economics double major with a minor in Chinese. She is interested in Sino-American relations and development economics.

Caleigh Bell-Rosof
Caleigh is minoring in Legal Studies, and plans to center their thesis project on the intersection of Gender and Sexuality Studies and Legal Studies, examining how the legal system functions in America to police bodies and queerness.

Thomas Bentsen
Tom is a Theatre double major and Dance minor. He is interested in the intersection of history, sexuality studies, and media/aesthetic analysis.

Margaret Cheever
Maggie is minoring in Environmental Policy and Culture. She plans to center her work in American Studies on the theme of displacement, examining intersections between climate change and refugee law and policy.

Daisy Conant
Daisy’s interests lie at the intersection of identity, political representation, and law in America, as well as the evolution and coalitional politics of social movements.

Kate Hader
Kate double majors in Social Policy with a minor in Gender and Sexuality Studies. Her concentration focuses on representations of femininity and girlhood in pop culture.

Jack Jordan
Jack is interested in local-level responses to issues of climate change and environmental justice in American cities, suburbs, and tribal lands through his double major in Environmental Science.

Thea Showalter
Thea is interested in issues surrounding immigration, racial justice, and international law. She also minors in sociology.
Student Advisory Board (SAB) Representatives for 2020-2021

Maggie Cheever & Keerti Gopal

Maddie Brown
Maddie is studying social justice movements, legal and political strategy, and the ways these forces interact with gender.

Dori-Taylor Carter
Dori-Taylor’s research focuses on the U.S. Census. Her interests include ethnic studies, gender and sexuality studies, and feminist theory.

Sunnie Eraso
Sunnie double majors in Theatre and is pursuing the Music Theatre Certificate. She is interested in how artistic creation and representation can affirm the mixed race identity and experience in America.

Eva Herscowitz
Eva is a Journalism double major with a minor in English. Her interests include media studies, gender and sexuality studies, and religious studies.

Danielle Spitz
Danielle double majors in History, with a special interest in 20th Century U.S. legal history. She assists with research in Gender and Sexuality Studies on the Chicago women’s health movement of the 1970s-80s.

Caleb Young
Caleb is a Political Science double major. He is interested in studying issues of sovereignty and citizenship.

Class of 2023
Tom: Congratulations on graduating last spring. How are things? What are you up to?

Amos: I stayed in Evanston post-grad. I had a part-time position with an outdoor adventure therapy nonprofit that transitioned to fulltime in July. I lead experiential activities with teens, and we did have some programs this summer/fall. But since many of our partners were unable to run this year, we've spent time on staff training—canoeing, sailing, therapeutic techniques—and equipment maintenance, along with administrative tasks.

Tell us a little bit about your senior project.

It was about the diversity and inclusion movement in the U.S. outdoor industry. I dug into the history of “wilderness,” outdoor recreation and adventure, and social norms and ideas surrounding who the outdoors “belongs to” and who “belongs” in the outdoors. I found that people are retelling erased histories of the relationships of Black, indigenous, queer, trans, and disabled people to the outdoors, and many people and organizations have created outdoor affinity groups and inclusive outdoor programming to practically and actively “diversify” the outdoors. I also conducted ethnographic interviews and observations at an outdoor adventure programming nonprofit with a mission of inclusion and analyzed the relationships of administrators to the inclusive mission versus the lived experience of ground-level staff members and with clients.

How has the work you did on that project translated into your current or future life?

I think my thesis was a big factor in getting hired for my current position. I wanted an outdoor programming job with a focus on equity and inclusion, and my thesis experience helped me land a position in exactly that field. It also prepared me with plenty of language and references to use in discussions this past summer about how to make our organization even more focused on racial justice and inclusive programming. In a more nebulous sense, my project has provided me with a network (for rec letters, friendships, potential job opportunities, potential roommates in new cities) and skills that I might use one day if I go to grad school. Re-reading my thesis every now and then also gives me a bit of a confidence boost, like, “Hey, I did that!”
Tom: Tell me about your senior project, and also a bit of your approach to choosing your coursework. Do you feel you were a good fit for the way American Studies majors select the courses that will fulfill their major?

Keerti: I love the way American Studies majors get to choose courses from different departments and craft their own concentration—it’s the biggest thing that drew me to the program in the first place! At first, I honestly just picked the courses that sounded the most exciting to me, but as I went on, I noticed some patterns, and, ultimately, honed my focus on social movements and social change, which brought me to my senior project. Two summers ago, through an Undergrad Research Grant, I got involved with the Sunrise Movement, which is a national youth-led climate justice network fighting for a Green New Deal. Sunrise has a really robust digital presence—they’re super active on Instagram, TikTok, Twitter. So for my senior project I’m looking at how the online and social media tactics used by Sunrise Movement have influenced youth politicization and the public profile of the Green New Deal, to study the role that digital organizing can play in new social movements.

Switching gears, I’d like to ask you about this past fall, during Covid—can you give us an idea of how school has been for you? It’s obviously a challenging time, so I want to encourage you to be candid here.

I was a part-time student this quarter, taking two classes so I could spend more time working with Sunrise Movement on the election and also continue an internship I’d started with Sara Gideon’s Maine senate campaign over the summer. In a lot of ways I felt much more detached from school than usual, but for me this quarter was defined by the election and by the conversations and activism that have been happening on campus. It has been such a scary year in so many ways, but I’ve seen a lot of people make a serious effort to get involved, whether through phone banking to get out the vote or attending protests against racism and police brutality, and it’s been really heartening to see people mobilize like that. I’m especially proud of my peers who’ve been leading the calls for abolition at Northwestern, pushing the administration to address racism and reimagine what safety on campus can and should look like. In terms of the pandemic, this year has been hard on everyone, but I’ve been really lucky to be safe and healthy and surrounded by great friends.

It’s so encouraging to hear stories about getting involved. Now, here’s a question that I sort of love and hate asking seniors: Do you have plans for post-graduation?

I currently have no plans for post-graduation! Ideally at some point I’d love to work at the intersection of climate justice and storytelling, and I’m really interested in advocacy/political narrative work, but post-graduation I’m just looking for a job that feels like it will make a positive impact and help me learn.
Curriculum 2019-20

Seminars for Majors

Fall  
*Resistance: Germany 1939 / America 1969*  
Robert Orsi & Christine Helmer (Religious Studies & German)

Winter  
*Work, Labor, and Social Formation*  
Ivy Wilson (English)

Spring  
*Comparative Race and Ethnicity*  
Shana Bernstein (American Studies and Legal Studies)

Other Courses

*Asian American Digital Cultures*  
Raymond San Diego (Asian American Studies)

*Catholic 60s*  
Robert Orsi (Religious Studies)

*Introduction to Pragmatism*  
Axel Mueller & Mauricio Maluff Masi (Philosophy)

*Critical Race and Gender Theory*  
José Medina (Philosophy)

*Sex and the American Empire: Journalism and Frames*  
Steven Thrasher (Journalism)

*Bad News*  
Lawrence Stuelpnagel (Journalism)

*Filipina/o/x American Cultural Studies*  
Raymond San Diego (Asian American Studies)

*American Judaism*  
Claire Sufrin (Religious Studies)
AUTHOR BOOK READING, FEBRUARY 2020

Contact/Host: Nitasha Sharma, Asian American Studies, n-sharma@northwestern.edu

R. Zamora Linmark, author of The Importance of Being Wilde at Heart (Delacorte Press, 2019)

Request for Co-Sponsorship and Funding:
Along with the Program in Asian American Studies at NU, I write to request your co-sponsorship and funding to support a visit by R. Zamora Linmark, author of the novel, The Importance of Being Wilde at Heart (Delacorte Press, 2019). Linmark will come to Northwestern University on February 26, 2020 for a book reading and talk open to the public. This event will appeal to students, faculty, and community members interested in the fiction writing process; LGBTQ young adult and immigrant literature, poetry, and cultural production; and queer coming-of-age narratives across Asian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino diasporic contexts. We invite people in Gender and Sexuality Studies, Creative Writing and English, Performance Studies, members of the Writing Program and Center for the Writing Arts, Asian Languages and Cultures, and other relevant fields to join us.

Winter Quarter Event:
- Free and open afternoon Book Talk

Budget:
- $1000 Honorarium for Linmark
- $250 Roundtrip Flight (New York – Chicago)
- $360 Lodging at the Hilton Orrington 2 nights
- $325 Dinner for 5 at the Stained Glass (or equivalent)
- $80 Airport Transportation
- $2015 Total Cost

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