

Mr. Francis
American Studies

Course Description

The English portion of this interdisciplinary American Studies course is a roughly chronological survey of American literature from 1620 to present day. Students will read, interpret, and write about texts from a wide-range of eras and genres, placing each within its historical context. This is a college-level course. Students will be encouraged to take the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Examination.

The core thematic goal of this course is to explore the evolution of an "American identity" in the United States, for the individual and the community, as depicted in influential and/or popular literature. It seeks to consider how a culture inspires and is inspired by its own art and rhetoric. Its main secondary purpose is to challenge and develop student's analytical skills, both as readers and as writers, in pursuit of a higher mastery of language arts skills.

Students will demonstrate proficiency in writing through a variety of genres and modes, including personal, persuasive, expository, analytical, and satiric. They will show an awareness of audience while each working to develop his or her own unique voice.

Attendance

Since class participation and demonstrable mastery of the material are criteria for assessing performance, attendance is critical. Students are expected to be in class every day. If you know that you will be absent ahead of time, please notify me as soon as possible. Students will not be excused from class for oversleeping or taking a long lunch, to study for other courses, to complete assignments, or to prepare for standardized exams.

You must manage your own academic, extracurricular, and personal pursuits. When you are absent, it is your responsibility to copy class notes, to acquire missed assignments, and to catch up on the material in a timely manner. Unexcused absences will be considered cuts and will affect your final grade for class work. Students who violate the school's cutting policy will incur serious grade penalties.

There will be one or more class trips each semester. These will be educational opportunities to take advantage of the many academic resources and cultural locations in the city. Students should be prepared to complete work missed for other classes.

Final grade:

Class work:	35%
Homework:	15%
Grades on essays:	50%

N.B. I have zero tolerance for cheating, plagiarizing, and cutting.

Discussion (approx. 10%): Contributions to discussion should reflect first-hand knowledge of the texts being considered, a solid understanding of the course material, and an awareness of the contributions of other class members. In order to receive full credit for class participation, you should participate about once per class period. A student will not receive a final grade above 88 if he or she never contributes to discussion.

- extemporaneous contributions to discussion
- reading from classroom writing activities

Preparedness (approx. 5%): Habitual lateness will affect your final grade. You are expected to be ready to begin class when the bell rings: this includes having your materials in class and being prepared to discuss the homework for the previous night. You must bring your notebook and any assigned readings to class, and students will be forgiven for forgetting the text only once per marking period. Do not make a habit of asking to return to other classrooms, your locker, etc.

- punctuality
- assigned texts and other materials
- rough drafts for peer editing

Engagement (approx. 10%): Students must obtain and maintain a notebook devoted to taking notes during class and a folder devoted to storing handouts and protecting assignments. You are expected to participate actively in all classroom discussions and activities. Do not make a habit of visiting the rest room with excessive regularity

- active listening and note-taking
- asking appropriate questions
- writing activities and small group discussions
- reading aloud and general helpfulness

There will also be an informal “community score” for the overall tone of the class. Students are expected to encourage each other to engage in appropriate academic behavior.

Homework (approx. 15%): Students should expect 20-30 minutes of reading most nights. A complete list of course readings is available on the class Web-site. Specific details for written homework will be provided on the class Web-site as the semester progresses.

- assigned reading
- proposals, writing samples, and other written homework
- on-line postings
- returning books

Projects (approx. 10%): Students will be responsible for collaborating on one or more major group projects and for completing one or more oral presentations each semester. Specific details will be provided on the class Web-site.

- group assignments
- oral presentations
- peer editing

Writing Assignments (approx. 45%)

- graded drafts of take-home writing assignments
- in-class writing assignments

Specific details for each writing assignment will be provided on the class Web-site as the semester progresses. For each take-home assignment, students will be responsible for submitting a proposal or outline, one or more rough drafts for peer review, and a draft with appropriate citation and a works cited list for assessment.

Essays will be assessed based on clarity, specificity, accuracy, fluency, and development, as well as grammar, punctuation, style, tone, organization, use of evidence, and the appropriate and effective use of a wide-ranging vocabulary. Paper grades will be assigned according to the SHS English Department grading rubric.

Extensions may be granted under extenuating circumstances, but must be negotiated at least two days before the official deadline. If necessary, students are encouraged to make appointments with me during free periods to discuss writing assignments or writing practices.

If you will be absent when an assignment is due, you must submit it electronically by 8 a.m. to avoid a penalty for lateness. You should cut & paste the assignment into the body of an e-mail message addressed to me and attach the file for the assignment as an .rtf (rich-text format). You must provide a hardcopy when you return to school. Any excuses intended to circumvent these expectations will be ignored.

The penalty is one grade step for each day that an assignment is late, including weekends and vacations. Students found to be engaging in any form of academic misconduct will receive a zero for the assignment. Failure to submit an assignment will also result in a zero for the assignment.

Revised Essay (approx. 5%): Over the course of the semester, each student will be asked to submit one revised draft of a graded essay. Although all students will be encouraged to rework each assignment based on the instructor's comments, only one revision will be submitted. The revised essay must be accompanied by the graded draft with Mr. Francis's comments. This revised essay will be assessed separately from the essay grades, based on improvements in writing mechanics, structure, and development of ideas. Students who fail to submit their assigned revision will lose 5 points from their third marking period grade.

Research

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the course, students will develop research skills for the completion of at least one independent research project per semester. Additionally, all group presentations will feature a research component that will be divided equally amongst group members. Projects will be assessed based on standards for evaluating the appropriateness of primary and secondary sources, strategies for incorporating researched material effectively and clearly, and rules for MLA- or Chicago-style citation. All assignments must present a clear and original thesis that has been analyzed through the use of a variety of sources.