Course Description: This course introduces students to the interdisciplinary field of American Studies. The course has two main aims: to familiarize students with some of the key theoretical and analytical categories that animate American Studies scholarship; and to introduce students to a range of interdisciplinary methods. By the end of the course, students should be able to analyze the diverse meanings of American national identity within their historical contexts; understand the social and cultural construction of axes of identity like race, class, gender, ethnicity, taste; and become more attentive to questions of methodology. In the process, students should also become more careful, critical readers and writers of cultural analysis.

Learning Objectives:
Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand the social and cultural construction of categories like race, class, and ethnicity in the context of the United States.
2. Recognize several key historical debates over the meaning of American national identity.
3. Develop a sense of the field of American Studies and some of the core questions that animate the field.
4. Become familiar with a range of methodological approaches in American Studies and the differences between them (i.e. ethnography versus textual/visual analysis of texts).
5. Demonstrate the ability to produce critical and interpretive prose that reflects an awareness of one’s own position as a writer and critic of American national identity.

Course Requirements and Important Dates:
Papers: There are 6 short papers assigned over the course of the term, plus one short essay assigned during finals week. The papers are assigned for Units 1-6 (see below due dates). Students must submit each of these papers in order to pass the class. Each paper
must be typed and double-spaced, and have an original title that reflects the substance of the paper. The final will be assigned and is due during finals week.

**Grading:** Each assignment is worth 100 points. Point total: 700. Scale: 700-630 = A; 629-560 = B; 559-490 = C; 489-420 = D; 419 and below = F.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the representation of another person’s words or ideas as your own without attribution or proper citation. Plagiarism on any assignment for this class will result in automatic failure in the course. D2L uses turnitin.com, and I will be checking Google and other search engines if I suspect plagiarism, so please avoid this unwise course of action. Please see the *SIUC Student Handbook* regarding the penalties for plagiarism, which include course failure and suspension, as well as possible expulsion from the university.

**Texts:** Available for purchase at the University Bookstore in the Student Center, as well as online via Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble.com, etc.

**Books:**
- Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, Vintage, 0679744398
- Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Grove Press, 0802141676
- John Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, Hill and Wang, 0809001330
- Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, Picador, 0312626681
- Sarah Vowell, *Take the Cannoli*, Simon and Schuster, 0684867974

**Films/TV shows:** [available for download via Amazon.com, Netflix, etc.]
- James Cameron, *Avatar*
- John Ford, *The Searchers*
- Spike Lee, *Bamboozled*
- Vince Gilligan *Breaking Bad* (Season 1, Episode 1 only!)

**Texts via D2L:**
In addition to the above books and films, there are a few selected texts available on D2L.

**Schedule:**

**Unit 1: The Pocahontas Complex: Savagery, Sex, and Native Women**

**Texts:**
- James Cameron, *Avatar*
- John Ford, *The Searchers*

**Assignment:** 4 page paper. 100 points.

**Due Date:** 1/31 by 11:00 pm. Turn in via D2L.

**Unit 2: The Politics of Cultural Appropriation**

**Texts:**
- Spike Lee, *Bamboozled* (film)
- Robert Toll, “Minstrels and African Americans in the Nineteenth Century” [D2L]
- Video clip of Vernon and Ryan minstrel performance [D2L]
- Video clip from *Tropic Thunder* [D2L]
- Youtube compilation of Hollywood depictions of blackface [D2L]
- Music video of Izzy Azalea’s “Fancy”
- “Cultural Appropriation Links” [D2L] [Note: this contains links to various news articles on the topic, as well as the video clips list above]

**Assignment:** 4 page paper. 100 points.
**Due Date:** 2/14 by 11:00 pm

**Unit 3: The American West: Myth and Reality**

**Text:**
Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*

**Assignment:** 4 page paper. 100 points.
**Due Date:** 3/6 by 11:00 pm.

**Unit 4: “Success” in America: Myth or Reality?**

**Texts:**
Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*
Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad* (Season 1, Episode 1)
George Saunders, “The Semplica Girl Diaries” [D2L]

**Assignment:** 4 page paper. 100 points.
**Due Date:** 3/27 by 11:00 pm. Turn in via D2L.

**Unit 5: Are We Having Fun Yet? Leisure in America**

**Texts:**
Kasson, *Amusing the Million*
David Foster Wallace, “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again” [D2L]

**Assignment:** 4 page paper. 100 points.
**Due Date:** 4/17 by 11:00 pm. Turn in via D2L.

**Unit 6: “Postindian” Authenticity**

**Texts:**
- James Clifford, “Identity in Mashpee” [D2L]
- Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

**Assignment:** 4 page paper. 200 points.
**Due Date:** 5/1 by 11:00 pm. Turn in via D2L.

**Unit 7: Finals Week Essay**

**Text:** Sarah Vowell, *Take the Cannoli*

**Due Date:** 5/13 by 3:00 pm. Turn in via D2L.