Amherst College
Fall 2015 English Courses

English 221 Writing Poetry I (English 354 equivalent course) (old and new requirements: 300+ English elective)
Wednesdays 2:00-4:30 Instructor: David Sofield
A first workshop in the writing of poetry. Class members will read and discuss each others’ work and will study the elements of prosody: the line, stanza forms, meter, free verse, and more. Open to anyone interested in writing poetry and learning about the rudiments of craft. Writing exercises weekly. Instructor Permission: Permission is required for interchange registration during the add/drop period only.

English 226 Fiction Writing I (English 354 equivalent course) (old and new requirements: 300+ English elective)
Tu/Th 10:00-11:20 Instructor: Judith Frank
A first course in writing fiction. Emphasis will be on experimentation as well as on developing skill and craft. Workshop (discussion) format. Limited enrollment. Please consult the Creative Writing Center website for information on admission to this course. Instructor Permission: Permission is required for interchange registration during the add/drop period only.

English 226 Fiction Writing I (English 354 equivalent course) (old and new requirements: 300+ English elective)
Wednesdays 2:00-4:40 Instructor: Amity Gaige
A first course in writing fiction. Emphasis will be on experimentation as well as on developing skill and craft. Workshop (discussion) format. Limited enrollment. Please consult the Creative Writing Center website for information on admission to this course. Instructor Permission: Permission is required for interchange registration during the add/drop period only.

English 274 Native American Literature (old requirements: 2nd American) (new requirements: 200+ or Anglophone/ethnic American)
Tuesdays 1:00-3:30 Instructor: Lisa Brooks
In 2013, Amherst College acquired one of the most comprehensive collections of Native American writing in the world—nearly 1,500 books ranging from contemporary fiction and poetry to sermons, political tracts, and tribal histories from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through this course, we will actively engage the literature of this collection, researching Native American intellectual traditions, regional contexts, political debates, creative adaptation, and movements toward decolonization. Students will have the opportunity to make an original contribution to a digital archive and interact with visiting authors. We will begin with oral traditions and the 1772 sermon published by Mohegan author Samson Occom and end with a novel published in 2014.
English 318 Childhood African/Caribbean Literature (old requirements: upper-level elective, non writing)(new requirements: Anglophone or 300+ elective)
Mon/Wed 12:30-1:50  Instructor: C. Rhonda Cobham Sander
The course will concentrate on Caribbean authors. It explores the process of self-definition in literary works from Africa and the Caribbean that are built around child protagonists. We will examine the authors’ various methods of ordering experience through the choice of literary form and narrative technique, as well as the child/author’s perception of his or her society. French texts will be read in translation. Open to first-year students with consent of the instructor.

English 338 Shakespeare (old and new requirements: English 221 Shakespeare equivalent)
Tu/Th 10:00-11:20  Instructor: Christopher Grobe
Readings in the comedies, histories, and tragedies, with attention to their poetic language, dramatic structure, and power in performance. Texts and topics will vary by instructor. Limited to 50 students.

English 343 Nature and Imagination (old and new requirements: 300+ elective)
Tu/Th 2:30-3:50  Instructor: Amelia Worsley
Can reading poetry change our understanding of our environment? How might the way we perceive nature be conditioned by the ways in which writers have imagined it? In turn, how might the way we perceive our own imaginations be conditioned by ideas about the natural world? Although “nature” might seem like a universal and unchanging concept, British Romantic writers did much to invent our modern perception of it. This course questions what “nature” might mean, and how it developed alongside changing ideas about the imagination.

We will read the writings of William Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth, Charlotte Smith, Lord Byron, Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, Keats, and Felicia Hemans alongside seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theories of the imagination by David Hume, Edmund Burke, and Immanuel Kant. We will also make frequent visits to the Mead Art gallery in order to experiment with some of these imaginative theories. Finally, we will debate what impact this history has had on current environmental discourse, contemporary ethics, and the Green movement. Some critics have argued, for instance, that the Romantics’ reverence for nature is more destructive than it might at first seem. Might it be more environmentally responsible to get rid of the Romantic concept of “nature” altogether?

English 350 American Origins (old requirements: 2nd American or 300+ non-writing elective)(new requirements: 300+ elective)
TuTh 10:00-11:20  Instructor: Lisa Brooks & Barry O’Connell
American Origins is a course in Early American literature and history. It explores when and how this country began. We readily forget that it only became the “United States” in 1789. Before that and from early in the European conquests, it was “the (Spanish, or French, or English, or Dutch) colonies,” or “America” and thus but a part of European settlements in both the Southern and the Northern hemispheres. It was also a place known as “Turtle Island,” with indigenous trade networks that traversed the continent. It was also a foreign land to which countless African people were brought as slaves, men and women who adapted and made this land their own. These simultaneities and complexities frustrate any comprehensive narrative of the period.
This will, then, be an experiment in shaping a transnational Early American literature and history course. Our goal is to expand the geographic and temporal boundaries of the subject using archival, print, and digital sources. We hope to learn multiple ways of reading the “texts” of early America: print books, pamphlets, broadsides, petitions, manuscripts and graphic media—and innovative scholarship. These will give us some access to the many peoples reshaping what was, in fact, a very Old World.

The end goal is for students to design a syllabus that can be used in secondary schools, or for a future course at Amherst. Open to sophomores, juniors, and seniors, and to first-year students with consent of the instructor. Limited to 36 students.

**English 358 American Fiction: 1950-2010** (old requirements: 2nd American or 300+ elective, non-writing) (new requirements: 300+ elective)
MWF 10:00-10:50  Instructor: William Pritchard
Novels and short fiction, mainly comic, by such writers as Evelyn Waugh, Saul Bellow, Flannery O’Connor, Elizabeth Taylor, Kingsley Amis, John Updike, Philip Roth, Nicholson Baker, Ian McEwan, Jonathan Franzen, Barbara Pym. The effort will be to refine and complicate one’s performance as a critic of these writers and their books.

**English 369 American Extravaganzas** (old requirements: 2nd American or 300+ elective, non-writing) (new requirements: 300+ elective)
TuTh 1:00-2:20  Instructor: Geoffrey Sanborn
“I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be extra-vagant enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limit of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced,” Thoreau writes in Walden. “Extra vagance! it depends on how you are yarded.” The aim of this course is to seek in a series of fictional extravaganzas by American authors a better understanding of how we are generally yarded, as readers of stories and novels, and what opens up for us when that yard expands. What does a wildness of invention, an insistent pressure on the confines of literary forms, make it possible for us to feel and know? What aspects of American cultural history are exposed to our view when writers freewheelingly generate, in Melville’s words, “more reality than real life itself can show”? Readings include Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, the stories of Donald Barthelme and Lydia Davis, Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping*, David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, Edward P. Jones’s *The Known World*, and Mat Johnson’s *Pym*.

**English 376 Narrative Cinema** (old and new requirements: 300+ elective)
Weds 2:00-5:00/Tu 7:00-9:00  Instructor: Baba Hillman
This course will introduce students to a diverse range of experimental approaches to narrative filmmaking. Students will gain skills in filmmaking and criticism through project assignments, readings and analysis of language, performance and visual structure within selected films. Workshops in cinematography, sound recording and editing will be offered. The course will concentrate on filmmakers who are working in a context of multiple languages, hybrid forms and transnational histories. Screenings will include works by Jia Zhangke, Mati Diop, Abderrahmane Sissako, Pedro Costa, Claire Denis, and Nagisa Oshima. Students will complete three film and video projects. Lab fee required. Course meetings include one three hour consecutive meeting per week and one screening time per week.
Recommended prior coursework: ENGL 287/FAMS 228, Introduction to Super 8 Film and Digital Video, or other introductory course in film and video, photography, or painting. Admission with consent of instructor. Please complete the questionnaire at https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/departments/film/infostu/forms and submit to Prof. Hillman. Limited to 13 students.

English 377 The Documentary Impulse (old and new requirements: 300+ elective)
TuTh 11:30-12:50; Mon 7:00-9:40 PM  Instructor: Pooja Rangan
his course focuses on the documentary impulse—that is, the desire for an encounter with the “real”—as a way of understanding the different philosophies and ideologies that have shaped the history and practice of documentary. We will approach canonical studies of the modes of documentary (e.g., expository, observational, poetic, reflexive), placing pressure on concepts whose resonance or antagonism has shaped the notion of documentary, such as spectacle, authenticity, reality, mimesis, art, fiction, and performance. In addition to encountering canonical documentary films and major debates, we will analyze documentary as a complex discourse that has been shaped by multiple media forms (such as photography, television, and new media) and exhibition contexts (the art gallery, the cinema, the smartphone). Assignments will include group presentations, analytical exercises, and a final research paper. Two class meetings and one screening per week. Recommended requisite: A prior introductory film course. Not open to first-year students. Limited to 35 students.

English 381 Cinema and Everyday Life (old and new requirements: 300+ elective)
Mon/Weds 2:00-3:20  Instructor: Amelie Hastie
Film theorist Siegfried Kracauer declared that some of the first films showed “life at its least controllable and most unconscious moments, a jumble of transient, forever dissolving patterns accessible only to the camera.” This course will explore the ways contemporary narrative films aesthetically represent everyday life—capturing both its transience and our everyday ruminations. We will further consider the ways we incorporate film into our everyday lives through various modes of viewings (the arthouse, the multiplex, the DVD, the mp3), our means of perception, and in the kinds of souvenirs we keep. We will look at films by Chantal Akerman, Robert Altman, Marleen Gorris, Hirokazu Koreeda, Marzieh Makhmalbaf, Terrence Malick, Lynne Ramsay, Tsai Ming-liang, Agnès Varda, Wong Kar-wai, and Andy Warhol. Readings will include work by Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Marlene Dietrich, Sigmund Freud, and various works in film and media studies. Two class meetings and one screening per week. Not open to first-year students. Limited to 30 students.

English 382 Avant-Garde Cinema (old and new requirements: 300+ elective)
TuTh 2:30-3:50; Mon 7:00-9:00 PM  Instructor: Joshua Guilford
This course examines the history of American avant-garde film, paying special attention to the alternative cultural institutions that have facilitated experimental cinema’s emergence and longevity in the U.S. since the 1940s. Through critical readings and weekly film screenings, we will analyze some of the major tendencies that have defined the postwar American avant-garde, including the poetic and amateur filmmakers of the ’40s and ’50s, the underground film and political documentary movements of the ’60s, the structural film and women’s cinema formations of the ’70s, the turn toward small-gauge and found footage practices in the ’80s, and more contemporary engagements with hand-made film and expanded cinema. Special emphasis will be given to the broader institutional practices that have surrounded the production and maintenance of avant-garde film culture. Examining critical histories of radical filmmaking collectives, cooperative distribution centers, art film societies, critical journals, and
experimental film archives, we will consider how the avant-garde’s interest in creating an alternative cinema necessitated a dramatic reorganization of existing modes of filmic production, distribution, exhibition, reception, and preservation. Screenings of films by Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, Andy Warhol, Barbara Rubin, Newsreel, Michael Snow, Barbara Hammer, Saul Levine, Peggy Ahwesh, Jennifer Reeves, and others will be included. Two class meetings and one screening per week. Requisite: One 100-level or 200-level FAMS or ENGL course, or consent of the instructor. Limited to 30 students.

**English 388 Screenwriting (old and new requirements: 300+ elective)**
Weds 2:00-5:00  Instructor: Christopher Johnson
A first workshop in narrative screenwriting. Through frequent exercises, readings and screenings we will explore the fundamentals of scene and story shape as they’re practiced in mainstream American commercial filmmaking while taking a broader look at what a screenplay might be outside of that world. We’ll look at two modes of writing that are often at odds with each other: the well-established craft of three-act screenwriting within the Hollywood tradition, on the one hand, and the more elastic possibilities of the audio-visual medium as exemplified by the so-called “art film,” on the other. One three-hour class meeting per week.

Open to sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Preference will be given to English and FAMS majors. Admission with consent of the instructor. Limited to 12 students. Please complete the questionnaire at https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/departments/film/infostu/forms.

**English 412 Medieval Manuscripts (old and new requirements: 300+ elective, non-writing)**
Wednesdays 2:00-4:30  Instructor: Ingrid Nelson
This course introduces students to the hands-on study of medieval manuscripts. Students will examine materials in the Frost Library archives, as well as print and digital facsimiles of medieval manuscripts, to learn about how medieval literature was copied and read in its own time. Students will learn the skills of paleography (reading old handwriting) and codicology (analyzing the materials and assembly of old books) in order to conduct original research on these materials. They will also learn about medieval and early modern book culture. The course includes a field trip to the Rare Books library at Harvard University. Open to juniors and seniors. Limited to 12 students.

**English 431 Transnational Shakespeare (old requirements: Shakespeare or 300+ elective, non-writing)(new requirements: 300+ elective)**
Tuesdays 2:30-5:00  Instructor: Anston Bosman
By studying selected Shakespeare plays and their afterlives in literature and performance, we will explore the fate of culture over centuries of global mobility. What qualities of Shakespeare’s works render them peculiarly adaptable to a world of intercultural conflict, borrowing and fusion? And what light does the translation and adaptation of Shakespeare shed on the dialectic of cultural persistence and change? Our examples may include European literature and theater; American silent film and musicals; post-colonial appropriations in India, Africa and Latin America; and versions in the drama, opera and cinema of China and Japan. The course includes an independent research project on a chosen case study. Requisite: ENGL 338 (Shakespeare). Open to juniors and seniors. Limited to 15 students.
English 456 Virtuality/Embodiment (old and new requirements: 300+ elective, non-writing)
Thursdays 1:00-4:30 Instructor: Marisa Parham
This class begins with narratives about individuals who pass—that is, who come to be recognized as someone different from whom they were sexually or racially “born as.” Such stories suggest that one’s identity depends minimally on the body into which one is born, and is more attached to the supplementation and presentation of that body in support of whichever cultural story the body is desired to tell. Drawing on familiar liberal humanist claims, which centralize human identity in the mind, these narratives also respond to the growing sophistication of human experience with virtual worlds—from acts of reading to immersions in computer simulation. But what kinds of tensions emerge when bodies nonetheless signify beyond an individual’s self-imagination? As technology expands the possibilities of the virtual, for instance surrogacy, cloning, and cybernetics, what pressures are brought to bear on the physical human body and its processes to signify authentic humanness? Rather than ask whether identity is natural or cultural, our discussions will project these questions into a not-so-distant future: What would it mean to take “human” as only one identity, as a category amongst many others, each also acknowledged as equally subject to the same social and biological matrices of desire, creation, and recognition? We will approach these questions through works of literature, philosophy, media history, and contemporary science writing. Open to juniors and seniors. Limited to 15 students.

English 457 Ellison’s Invisible Man (old requirements: 2nd American or 300+ elective, non-writing)(new requirements: 300+ elective)
Tuesdays 2:30-5:00 Instructor: Jeffrey Ferguson
Ralph Waldo Ellison wrote *Invisible Man* to confirm the existence of the universal in the particulars of the black American experience. The same can be said of the larger aim of this course. It will provide students with the opportunity to explore the broadest themes of Black Studies through the careful reading of a particular text. Due to its broad range of influence and reference, *Invisible Man* is one of the most appropriate books in the black tradition for this kind of attention. The course will proceed through a series of comparisons with works that influenced the literary style and the philosophical content of the novel. The first part of the course will focus on comparisons to world literature. Readings will include James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*; and H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man*. The second part of the course will focus on comparisons to American literature. The readings in this part of the course will include Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man*; William Faulkner, “The Bear”; and some of Emerson’s essays. The last part of the course will focus on comparisons with books in the black tradition. Some of the readings in this part of the course will include W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* and Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*. Requires 20-25 page research paper. Limited to 15 students. Open to juniors and seniors. Preference given to Black Studies majors.

English 477 The Confession (old and new requirements: 300+ elective, non-writing)
Thursdays 2:30-5:00; Tuesdays 7:00-9:40 PM Instructor: Pooja Rangan
Confession is arguably central to expressions of postmodern selfhood in TV talk shows, YouTube videos, tweets, and Facebook updates. It also informs the evidentiary logic of our civil apparatuses (legal, medical, humanitarian) and infuses the fabric of our diplomatic, familial, and intimate relations. Indeed, we might say that the confession is the preeminent practice through which we understand the “truth” of our selves. This course investigates the many meanings and itineraries of the confession. We will focus on the various institutional sites that have shaped confessional regimes of truth (such as the
church, the school, the clinic, the prison, the courtroom), as well as the role of media forms (from autobiographical video to cinematic melodrama and reality television) in consolidating and challenging these regimes. Readings and assignments emphasize a twinned engagement with media and cultural theory. Topics include: narratives on coming-out, truth and reconciliation, hysteria, torture, the female orgasm, insanity defenses, and racial passing. One two hour-and-forty-minute class meeting and one screening per week. Requisite: At least one foundational course in FAMS or equivalent introductory film course, plus any one course in cultural studies/literary theory/gender studies/race and ethnicity studies. Open to juniors and seniors. Limited to 18 students.

**English 496 Literary/Critical Theory (old and new requirements: 300+ elective, non-writing)**

Mondays 2:00-5:00 PM  
Instructor: Alicia Christoff

This course introduces students to the basic concepts and methods of literary and critical theory, a body of work that explores and critiques modern assumptions about truth, culture, power, language, representation, subject-formation, and identity. Surveying a wide range of authors and approaches (postcolonial, gender studies and queer theory, critical race theory, psychoanalytic, etc.), we will also draw on the expertise of our own faculty, bringing in weekly guest speakers to help explain particular methodologies and to tell us about how they engage with theory in their own scholarship. In this upper-level seminar, students will grapple with complex theoretical texts, consider the place of theory in literary studies and in film, media, and cultural studies as well, and begin to imagine ways of putting theoretical ideas to work for themselves. Open to juniors and seniors. Limited to 18 students.