AMERICAN CONVERSATIONS

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American Conversations is a learning community that introduces students in their first two years to the liberal arts through an integrated sequence of four courses. Over that time students pursue conversations that have shaped the history and culture of the United States and seek to live Thomas Jefferson’s dream that free and educated citizens should learn to understand what is going on in the world and to keep their part of it going right.

Overview of the Program

Like the college’s other conversations programs, American Conversations is open to students of all interests who like to read, discuss, write about ideas, and look at issues through the lenses of several disciplines at once. Each course combines the study of history, literature and other arts, race, ethnicity, and a variety of human and behavioral sciences to provide students with a starting point for gaining greater lifelong inquiry into American thought and values.

One faculty member who teaches American Conversations remains with students through four courses in the sequence and teams with a second professor from a different area of study each semester. Students live in the same residence hall during their first year, enjoy some meals and special events together, and create a support system and learning community prior to the time when most students select a major.

Intended Learning Outcomes for the Program

See http://wp.stolaf.edu/curriculum-committee/american-conversations-program-ilos/

Admission to the Program

Each year approximately 38 first-year students are admitted to American Conversations. Entering first-year students receive information about the program soon after their admission to St. Olaf College.

Course Equivalents for General Education Requirements

By successfully completing the four courses of American Conversations, a student fulfills the following general education requirements:

• First-Year Writing [FWY] (one course);
• Historical Studies in Western Culture [HWC] (one course);
• Multicultural Studies—Domestic [MCD] (one course);
• Artistic Studies [ALS-A] (one course);
• Literary Studies [ALS-L] (one course);
• Human and Behavioral Sciences [HBS] (one course);
• Courses with Writing [WRI] (one course);
• Oral Communication [ORC] (one course)

Courses

AMCON 110 - AMCON 211 are offered only to first-year students and sophomores enrolled in the American Conversations program. American Conversations students must take these courses in sequence.

AMCON 110: American Stories

Americans have long understood their diverse identities through stories. This course analyzes familiar and less familiar narratives that have formed and re-formed identity in the context of American culture. Students examine literary works, histories, cultural artifacts, and media, paying attention to the forms and themes through which the American experience is constructed. They develop their own writing skills. The course also introduces students to the American Conversations program’s emphasis on civic engagement. Offered annually in the fall semester. Counts toward American studies major.

Prerequisite: enrollment in the American Conversations program.

AMCON 111: Borders and Empires

The United States was founded by breaking away from an empire, yet has grown into an imperial power. This course explores territorial expansion, the development of a pluralistic American state with varied internal borders and cultural realms, and the emergence of the United States as a world power. Examining American history through lenses used by creative artists, historians and social scientists, students consider such topics as global trade, slavery, urbanization, and war. Offered annually in the spring semester. Counts toward American studies major.

Prerequisite: AMCON 103.

AMCON 201: Remaking America, 1865-1945

Burgeoning cities and industrialism, an emerging market economy, changing opportunities for women, an influx of immigrants, and the migration of African Americans to urban centers -- all opened questions of freedom of expression, distribution of resources, and American identity. Topics and texts range from the Statue of Liberty and the World's Columbian Exposition to the Model T Ford and the Harlem Renaissance. Offered annually in the fall semester. Counts toward American studies major.

Prerequisite: AMCON 101 and AMCON 102.

AMCON 202: Pursuits of Happiness, 1920-Present

Students in this course examine technology, the mass market and consumerism, and the increasingly complex relations between identity and material goods. They also explore the images, institutions, and stories of environmental, feminist, and Civil Rights activists in the context of Cold War America. Topics and texts range from Yosemite National Park and Japanese internment camps to Adrienne Rich’s poetry and prose, Freedom Summer, Las Vegas, and the Mall of America. Offered annually in the spring semester. Counts toward American studies, race and ethnic studies, and women’s and gender studies majors and management studies, race and ethnic studies, and women’s and gender studies concentrations.

Prerequisite: AMCON 101, AMCON 102, and AMCON 201.
AMCON 210: Journeys and Encounters
The dynamic, multidimensional character of American culture originates in the journeys and encounters of groups defined by race/ethnicity and factors such as gender, religion, sexual orientation, and social class. As they respond to opportunities, challenges, and conflicts, groups construct meaning and produce art and literature. Using the tools of social science and artistic and literary studies, students examine resulting changes and how institutions, ideas, and policies shape (and are shaped by) these processes. Offered annually in the fall semester. Counts toward American studies major.

Prerequisites: AMCON 103 and AMCON 104.

AMCON 211: Fear and Hope
Hope, based on expectations of opportunity, and fear, grounded in cataclysms, shape everyday life and the United States' role in the world. Fears underlie conflicts between groups; hope animates social movements and energizes human rights initiatives. This course prepares students to be engaged citizens on campus and beyond. A culminating civic engagement experience draws from previous American Conversations assignments. Students will help design part of the course, shaping future conversations of hope and fear. Offered annually in the spring semester. Counts toward American studies major.

Prerequisites: AMCON 103, AMCON 104, and AMCON 203.

Faculty

Director, 2018-2019
L. DeAné Lagerquist
Professor of Religion
church history; American religion; Christianity in India; Lutheranism

Joshua R. Anderson
Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science and Environmental Studies
American politics; political philosophy; history of science

Marc David
Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology/Anthropology
race and class; history and memory; public policy and the politics of knowledge; North America

Carlos Gallego
Associate Professor of English
Chicano/a studies; 20th century American literature; comparative ethnic studies; philosophy and critical theory; cultural studies

Colin Wells
Professor of English, Associate Dean of Humanities
early American literature; 18th-century literature