

AMERICAN CONVERSATIONS

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** On hiatus academic year 2023-24. Not accepting first year students.**

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.

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 of the first three semesters. 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

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.

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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.

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.

Prerequisite: AMCON 110.

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.

Prerequisites: AMCON 110 and AMCON 111.

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.

Prerequisites: AMCON 110, AMCON 111, and AMCON 210.

Faculty

Director, 2023-2024

Kristina Medina-Vilariño

Associate Professor of Romance Languages - Spanish Caribbean Studies; 20th- and 21st-century Latin American studies; contemporary Latino studies; race and ethnic studies

Marc David

Associate Professor of Practice of Sociology/Anthropology race and class; history and memory; public policy and the politics of knowledge; North America